

# VENDOR REALITY RETROSPECTIVE

# GROUND COVER

NEWS AND SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUND UP

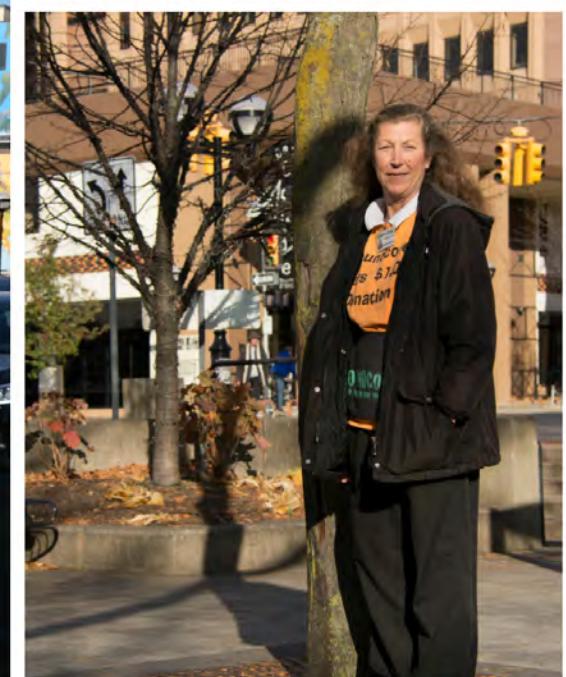
SECTION ONE

SPECIAL ISSUE 2017



\$10

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# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Meeting goals – a vendor update on making the most of a second

by Kevin Spangler  
Groundcover Vendor #307

I got a “driving under the influence” (DUI) citation right around the time I found out I was having a baby at 33 years old. I resisted arrest, which is considered a serious crime. So I was looking at some time in jail. I knew I was having a kid so I decided to just do jail time and not play the probation game for the next five years.

The judge, probation officer and public defender blessed me with a six-month sentence. In that time, I sat down and had time to reflect and rewire my brain to be a positive member of society. My idea was to work for the local pedicab business but they never answered my calls while I was in the shelter. So I worked three minimum-wage jobs and sold Groundcover News to save up to buy my first pedicab in March.

I started out working as much as I could. I was not making any money



Baby Romando loves riding in his daddy's pedicab, as do customers in downtown Ann Arbor.

but I was determined to be successful. I worked long hours every day, giving free rides to everyone who was interested in trying a brand-new business in town. I eventually started making money because I was filling a need for short transfers around town with an entertainment aspect.

A second chance is what I got with this business. Not having a license and being a convicted felon, the only jobs I could get paid minimum wage. I knew that to take care of my family and for my girlfriend able to care for our baby full-time, I had to figure out a way to make a living wage.

I recently signed a lease for a one-bedroom apartment, so now my family can live under one roof. This is a huge milestone – being able to save up enough money for move-in costs and finding someone who will rent to a felon.

I now have seven pedicabs and have created second chances for people in recovery while preventing people from getting behind the wheel after they've been drinking. The premise of my business is that we work on donations and all donations go to grow and expand the business to create jobs for people in recovery.

My collaborative view with the city is a vision of fewer cars in the downtown area. With more and more new housing going up in Ann Arbor, we at Boober Tours are filling a much-needed alternative, fun mode of transportation.

Groundcover has offered their entire sales team a Financial Empowerment class as part of their Matched Savings program. I jumped on the opportunity to be a part of this class. We are learning about credit repair, saving, how to document spending, and allocating your money properly.

Now that I am up to seven pedicabs I need to plan wisely around where money goes, and need savings for repairs since these pedicabs are on the road at least eight hours a day. These Michigan roads put a beating on them. The financial empowerment class is teaching us how to set goals, which is very helpful in anyone's spending plan. Goals are so important in everyone's life.

My son, Romando, is six months old. He is crawling everywhere and standing up now. His favorite things are my sunglasses and keys. He is very sociable and loves to laugh at everything. He loves riding on the pedicabs with his daddy. He is always the first one to test ride the pedicabs. I can see his genius IQ and his high EQ (emotional quotient) coming out, so I am on pace to meeting my goals.



## Perfect

by Kevin Spangler  
Groundcover Vendor #307

My new baby, Romando Anthony Spangler, is perfect.

When he sleeps he is calm and sweet and smiles at his dreams. He is advanced, efficient at communicating and growing quickly. He figured out how to breastfeed on his second try on the day he was born, and he develops better techniques with each feeding. In regards to his health, Romando is perfect in his vision and has a strong brain and immune system. Romando has a perfect future ahead of him because he will have leadership qualities, a high IQ, be very talented and cosmically-charged.

## GROUNDCOVER MISSION:

*Creating opportunity and a voice for low-income people while taking action to end homelessness and poverty.*

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## Miriam fulfills promise, starts writing

by Miriam Lindsay  
Groundcover Vendor #6

I'd like to start by saying hello to all of our dedicated Groundcover News readers. My name is Miriam Lindsey. I am Vendor #6. I get asked often by supporters of our newspaper, "Do you ever write for Groundcover News?"

And I answer, "Yes, only once."

That article was called "Miriam Lindsey Takes on Social Security." My next article was supposed to be about the outcome of my Social Security case, pending since 2009. I just got the good news that the case was decided in my favor and the settlement should move forward next month!

Meantime, I haven't thought much about what else to write about, but I've told some of our supporters that I'd start writing articles. So, here I go! First, I can truly thank Groundcover News for showing me a way out of the Delonis Shelter. I've never had to return. When Susan Beckett published the first Groundcover paper, I received

my first donations. I am all of what Groundcover is meant to stand for, all of what Susan Beckett had in her heart and on her mind, when Groundcover News was born.

I have epilepsy, I am legally blind, I suffer from mood swings. I grew up in different State Hospitals from age 10 to 18, with very little education. Like I said, I am the perfect representation of what Groundcover News is all about.

At age 64, my granddaughters gave me their dog as a birthday gift. His name is Rosco – he is also known as Vendor #6½. Rosco does a very good job making people laugh and putting smiles on their faces. Some even stop to make a donation and get a paper.

*Groundcover News: News and Solutions from the Ground Up* is a good thing. Please do not feel sorry for me, because God is great. I'd rather you take from my article that selling Groundcover News is a valued job to some vendors like myself – Vendor #6... and my assistant, Vendor #6½.

# COMPASSION

## Remember us Vendors!

by Elizabeth  
“Lit” Kurtz  
Vendor #159

Please don't forget us as we stand on the side of the road, or we may freeze as the temperatures drop this winter. While for the most part vendors try to be jovial, friendly and amicable, it must not be forgotten that this paper can serve as a lifeline

for those of us whose lives are on the edge and that we are still vulnerable and at risk of succumbing to the bitter realities of homelessness, the greatest of these being exposure and hunger. Very often our lives depend on whether a sale is made. Even during the hardest winter months, not all vendors are able to connect with the local shelter for services.

I have witnessed vendors standing for hours trying to sell enough papers to buy a meal. I know of a vendor who needs to make enough sales in a week



Vendors selling with Mayor Christopher Taylor, February 2015.

to supply gas money to a relative so that he doesn't lose his job. I personally make a quota to secure a nightly place in the hotel where I now reside at a negotiated weekly rate.

Sales ability plays a role, and while we are fortunate enough to have Joe Woods, a talented and experienced salesperson serve as sales manager, salesmanship should not be the sole factor in one's decision to buy a paper. Every vendor has a purpose, a hope, a dream and perhaps a right to gain

traction in getting out of her or his circumstances. Whether your vendor laughs and jokes or simply stands and mumbles, we all need support to remain viable and be given hope that we can emerge from our plights.

So while this is a wonderful paper, it can be considered much more than just a purchase – it is also an opportunity to engage and understand another person's struggles. It is a chance to supply a need or to encourage others to become supporters. As the cold weather approaches, it is more important than ever to focus on the critical needs of vendors whose needs run the gamut from food and shelter to transportation. A single sale may mean the difference

in someone having a miserably cold night or being able to purchase propane in order to survive the frigidly cold night temperatures of a Michigan winter.

As is often the case, the demands of life cause important activities to slip our minds. That's why we should perhaps focus on what message caused Pope Francis' trip to the United States to be a success. That is, to “remember the poor.” So as the temperatures drop and the demands of life take up much of your time, please try to make concerted effort to find a vendor and purchase a Groundcover paper – and maybe one for a friend.

## Note left in Tony's shoe

*(Left with no alternative in early spring, Tony was sleeping under a bridge. He awoke to find the following note and a \$5 bill in his shoe.)*

I left you some money. I just wanted to say that you are great. You are a fantastic person. You can do anything. The thing about life is you are always at a crossroad when you want to be. Anything is possible with drive.

If you have a dream, fight for it, and even if you don't have a dream, you just have to keep dreaming and you'll find one. I know things are more than hard for someone without a home, but you can always find strangers that care, even when they are hard to find. (Especially in this day and age.) Just know that my heart goes out to you, and that I hope you find happiness wherever you are.

Have a wonderful life!

## Boober Tours: vendor's update

by Kevin Spangler  
Groundcover Vendor #307

Boober Tours is my pedicab company. We drive people around town in our bicycle-powered cabs. We offer campus and city tours as well as rides in specialized pedicabs equipped for karaoke, photo booths, and so on. I have been discussing ordinances with City Council, so Boober Tours can work together with the community to keep our streets and patrons safe.

On Thursday, September 15, I moved into a commercial storage building that has an office and a garage to put all my pedicabs in. I had been looking on Craigslist and even driving my pedicab everywhere to try to find a spot, but had no luck until now. The landlord chose me over seven other people who wanted to rent that space.

Being able to show my articles from Groundcover was a big help in showing that I have turned my life around. Boober headquarters will be great place for my motivational meetings to get everyone pumped up for the night helping people from place to place.

I was also contacted again by a local pedicab operator who was quitting the business and I purchased my seventh pedicab and a bunch of extra parts. They are definitely needed in this business, especially in Michigan where the roads beat up these pedicabs. Maintaining these pedicabs is a full 40-hours-a-weeks' worth of work.

I plan on pedicabbing year-round now that I have three all-weather canopies and just need one more. I went all-in with this business. After going through the budgeting class, I have planned out my spending plan until April. My goal is to pay all bills up to April over the next three months.

In the winter months, I will be investing, learning and developing a new pedicab at Maker Works, a 14,000-square-foot facility that has all the tools you could dream of and pay just \$90 a month to use. You do have to go through a training course for each machine to make sure you know how to use everything properly. I am dreaming of a pedicab with the least amount of maintenance. Boober Tours – the only way!

by Aimee Ciccarelli  
Groundcover Vendor #112

In the 1990s, my father – Thomas James Ciccarelli – owned a bar in Ypsilanti called The Spaghetti Bender. He also owned a catering business called Festival of Foods. Every Saturday home game for University of Michigan football, we catered a tailgate party for Georgia Pacific at Allmendinger Park.

These were some of the most exciting events I have ever been involved with. We had huge barbecue grills and a pavilion set up with giant stainless steel bowls full of potato salad and macaroni salad and cookies all in a pattern on a tray. There was hot apple cider and coolers full of soda. I worked with my son strapped to my back. (He's 16 now.)

You see, we were feeding 500 or more people and when they came before

the game, they would trickle in 10 or 15 at a time. But when they came post-game, they would come 500-strong – drunk and hungry. We would have those grills hot and ready, flipping burgers and chicken and hotdogs and salmon.

The people sat picnic-style and ate. Afterwards, they would get up and throw the football around and the kids would play. But no matter if Michigan won or lost – and, of course, they usually won – a good time was had by all. I will always cherish those football memories.

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*Thanks to GroundCover News for spreading the word and providing an outlet where there was none.  
We are proud to support your mission and good work!*

# PERSONAL STORIES

## Telling my story: a journey of sacrifice

by Alice Newell  
Groundcover Contributor

My story is not foreign to those who have faced challenges. Adjustments can affect your spirit, soul, emotions, life perspective and so many other things as your drive for survival can drain your energy. Situations can quickly shift from bad to good or vice-versa in an instant. There's nothing permanent, especially when you're on a fixed income. State programs make an individual account for each crumb that enters their home. Through this experience, I've learned that with every step of freedom there are tearful sacrifices.

It was in 2010 where the journey of sacrifice began. My mother had died. My brother, who helped me care for our ailing parents, had returned to Georgia. My children and I had to learn how to survive on a monthly social security income and the Section 8 program for rent. Two teenaged girls depended on me to cobble together our remaining resources to create a manageable living for a household of three.

The devastating blow came when our food stamps were cut off. My oldest daughter, who is a type-2 diabetic, was affected greatly by this decision. She had certain dietary needs to attain a nutritionally-balanced meal that agreed with the medicine her doctor had pre-



Alice Newell leaves no stone unturned in her quest for a healthy life for her and her daughters, despite a lack of resources.

scribed for her.

Stressed beyond measure, I hunted for jobs, but due to physical limitations, I could only apply for temporary positions. I worked as a home-health aide for a while until I injured my left ankle. I tore two tendons, which matched my previously-injured right ankle from a long time ago. Standing and walking for long periods of time became difficult. Delays in work hindered our family's financial progress. My girls had a hard time concentrating in school during these tough times.

None of us knew how to drive so we depended heavily on public transportation to get to and from our destinations. Tensed to an extreme, with only our faith in God to cope, "seek and ye shall find" became our motto. Our limited budget was extended to its capacity and being cut off of food stamps made things worse.

In September of 2014, my doctor diagnosed me, too, as a type-2 diabetic, another dilemma to add to our circumstances. Then in November of 2015 my youngest daughter's pediatrician announced that she had the same

ailment. Our family had to adjust to a new lifestyle concerning our health. Shuffling priorities to make things work with what little we had became a daily chore. Hopping from bus to bus, we travelled from food bank to food bank to get enough nourishment to make a meal. Being diabetics, we must be careful of what we consume, particularly starches and sugars. But a family in need cannot afford to be overly selective with donated goods, and must rather receive them with gratitude. We had to learn how to make a well-balanced meal out of what we had to balance a limited budget.

Finally, in May of 2016, a pivotal breakthrough occurred in our nutritional crisis. After numerous attempts of re-applying for food benefits, our food stamps case was reopened. We are eating healthier and have started an exercise routine of walking and swimming. I also participate in a nutritional class to learn how to prepare a well-balanced meal on a budget.

We are just an example of the many families who encountered an economic, medical and nutritional crisis due to the government's shuffling. Five years of pain has paid off with one hurdle overcome – though no doubt there will be many others to conquer in the future. A family's faith cannot be broken as long as they stick together.

## Damaged lives – how my children and I were let down by the system



by La Shawn Courtwright  
Groundcover Vendor #56

I am a 47-year-old woman who has endured many forms of abuse: sexual abuse; the neglect of my high school guidance counselor, the dean of students, and the assistant principals of positive intervention; domestic abuse at the ages of 22 to 25 years; the abuses of power and reckless and torturous acts of human services agencies such as Child Protective Services (CPS) and Homes for Black Children.

Out of extreme distrust of social and human service organizations, it took me about 19 years to see a psychiatrist regarding my issues. I was diagnosed in June 2015, at age 46, as having four mental illnesses. I suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety-depression – an unspecified mood disorder – and Cluster B personality traits.

As a child, I was molested by a male

family member who I once trusted. I felt guilty and ashamed about what happened to me once I realized it was inappropriate touching. I used to think of myself as stupid and blamed myself for the abuse. I seemed to attract men that were emotionally and/or physically abusive. I've been raped numerous times. I'm blessed to not have contracted STDs.

My first year of high school I managed a 4.0 GPA. My first teenage experience listening to older teens cost me. It was after my mom made me stay out all night, because I went to a house party and came back at 1:00 a.m., that I began to rebel. I was just curious, and coerced by two girls to come to the party. These girls had babies already. It was not uncommon for teenagers to do this. I did not use any drugs or alcohol at this party; I was merely fascinated seeing my peers dancing sensually with each other and drinking and smoking weed. I'd lost track of time and was terrified to return home at such a late hour. My mom was furious and told me to go back to where I'd come from. I didn't know I could call the police for help. Once again I felt stupid and thought

of myself as a bad girl unworthy of my mother's love. I was very confused. I reported this incident to my counselor and no action was taken. This only reinforced the idea that I deserved that punishment.

I talked to the woman across the street

about how my mom reacted and I believe she called CPS on my mother. The case was closed for reasons unknown to me. My mom never abused drugs. I think she may have been asked to do a drug test and the investigation was closed.

**see DAMAGED, page 5**

## Without a check: Lady M

As told to La Shawn Courtwright  
Groundcover vendor #56

(Editor's note: This is part of a series of investigations into the survival strategies used by people who receive no paycheck or cash assistance. Our thanks to Luke Schaeffer, of the University of Michigan School of Social Work and author of \$2 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America for commissioning these works and generously sharing them with us.)

I live under a bridge with other homeless people. I also couch surf – or sometimes rent a motel room. I rip off people who pick me up off of Michigan Avenue in Ypsilanti, Michigan. In the car, I tell them to pull into an area where I know that I can run and get away quickly without them being able to see where I went. I also panhandle and get money from people who know that I have nowhere to go. (They work close to the bridge I sleep under when I have no place to go.)

I've also stayed at my drug dealer's house when I spent my money with him. I've also slept in abandoned houses for shelter. I survived off of eating Oreo cookies and bottled water. I'm currently incarcerated.

## Damaged lives – how my children and I were let down by the system

**continued from page 4**

Before this I'd lived a very nurturing and positive life. My mom had been very protective of me and my siblings. I began to be truant from school, attending classes only two to three days a week. I was able to maintain A's and B's on classwork, homework and exams, yet my attendance affected my grades tremendously. I was not advancing past the 10<sup>th</sup> grade due to that. That a student such as myself – a person who used to work as an assistant secretary for Ms. Poulios and participated on the swim team – began to fall back at such a sudden rate, reinforced my claims about the issues at home.

I worked as a caddy from the age of 14 to 18. Both the dean of students and the assistant principal decided to issue me an overage referral rather than aid me in pursuing my high school diploma.

When I started my family, the ghosts from my past lifestyle spilled over into it in a negative, misconceived way. I would use two drugs recreationally with a few old acquaintances. I got drugs from my child's dad. He sold drugs and kept me supplied with them when I asked – and at times when I didn't, too.

I moved out when he got raided by the police and I was at home alone. The officers found two of the guns but no drugs. That was it for me. After I moved he became abusive towards me. He gave me three black eyes over a year and a half before I left him for good. I still have permanent black eyes from the trauma and one of my eyes sits back further in the socket than the other.

As a mother, I was investigated by CPS. They referred my case to Homes for Black Children (HFBC). I was a parent who never left her children and cared deeply for them. I did not trust people with my babies because of the things that happened to me. I did all of the things that CPS and HFBC told me to do. When I'd complete one goal they'd promptly assign me another. I was like, "How much longer before I can get my children?" They told me to just do as they said or have my parental rights terminated for non-compliance.

I later discovered that they made me complete so many courses so that the CPS workers could state that I had an extensive history with CPS. They told me that they were working to reunite my family but in court, the CPS worker said that it was in the best interest of my children to become wards of the state. The court-appointed attorney only talked with me for about five minutes before each of the hearings and never

advised me of my right to appeal the decision.

I was blind to these practices. I questioned the HFBC about the care of some of my children by the Hamiltons, their foster family. They blew me off and told me the Hamiltons were good people.

They ended up terminating my rights after two years of hell. They never proposed restoring custody of my children because none of my family visited the children or came to court in support of me and my family. My children were severely tortured and abused by the Hamiltons over a 12-year period until my eldest son escaped and had his younger brother rescued. They had moved to North Carolina, away from all that my children knew before.

I regret not having appropriate coping skills and instead opting to use drugs, but the punishment was more severe than what the situation called for. I had a lack of healthy coping skills, yet I always loved and took the best care of my children. I'll never stop loving them. I was devastated by losing them and went into a deep depression and experienced deep despair.

I cried until I could not cry any more tears. I drank heavily to numb my pain and to escape the living hell I'd created or contributed to. This pain was and still is deep within my soul. I just don't use alcohol anymore. I used to drink to sleep and it worked sometimes and not others. Over five years later, it led to my having legal issues. However, I was wrongly convicted of three charges due to being lied on. It was easy to be convicted under circumstances like these when you have a criminal history mostly based around alcohol use.

I've reunited with all my children except the 25-year-old and the 17-year-old, even though children are pretty much lost in the system. They change their names, which robs them of their heritage and makes it harder to trace them back to their true parents. This should be outlawed. People can end up marrying their own family or having other relations without knowing it.

When I set out to find my adult children, the adoption agency took weeks upon weeks to respond and, when they finally did, got my daughter's birthdate wrong, although I provided the proper name, age, and hospital, city, and state she was born in. I also sent photocopies of my ID and her proof picture taken at birth. It's a shame that the Intermediary Counsel charges \$250 and an additional

\$20 fee, and you may have to wait six months just for a response, not even a guaranteed success in locating your children.

The report they gave me on my daughter was pitiful. She went to many different homes and lived her young life without a stable home. This is torture, not best interest. I was told by an employee in this organization that a lot of people admit to doing foster care solely for the money, not because they have the child's best interests at heart. It's sad and tragic how my bad choices changed the lives of my innocent children.

My problems with the law persisted. On one occasion a person I knew, but had not been aware they were a registered sex offender, attempted to penetrate me in my sleep. I woke up and reacted in extreme violence. I associate this with PTSD. However, when the police came, they never listened to me as I told them that he tried to rape me and that he was lying, stating that it was his residence and I was his significant other. I was never given a rape kit exam, my attorney never did any discovery, and he was almost impossible to contact. My publisher and another person besides me made numerous attempts to contact him. He never returned any of their calls.

Due to the threats of the prosecutor and the total disregard by my court-appointed counsel, I consequently pled guilty to felonious assault, afraid that I could spend one to five years in

prison, even though the case against me was weak. I was especially vulnerable because I had been convicted of domestic violence in May 2010. My accuser, "R," wanted to control me one day, as he had often done before, and I refused to comply. He called the cops and knew what to do to likely have me convicted. I pled guilty to domestic violence when my attorney, Mr. Nader Nassif, told me that Judge Julie Creal told him that if I did not plead guilty to the charge, then she would make me wait four months to get a jury trial while remanded to the Washtenaw County Jail. My second-chance daughter was only five months old and I didn't want to be away from her. Also, I'd just had a surgery to prevent cancer and was healing. Still, there's no way I committed domestic violence against 240-pound man whose biceps are as large as my head.

I moved away from "R" two months later. I became homeless in 2011 and gave custody of my daughter to her dad. I'd lost my employment. I would not do work where I could not bring my baby. I was in a bit of a depression about the situation I was in and I picked the bottle up again.

It was in June of 2015 that I listened to a trusted friend that began to suggest that I see a psychiatrist to get professional counseling. He acknowledged to me that he thinks highly of me and said that alcohol brings out an unbearable characteristic.

**see DAMAGED, page 11**

## Without a check: La Shawn

**by La Shawn Courtwright  
Groundcover Vendor #56**

When I was homeless at the age of 32, I lived on Belle Isle with Frank, my best friend. We obtained two grocery carts that were in the grocery store parking lot after the store's hours of operation. We had taken the things we needed to the island and stashed them not too far from the Turkey Grill Restaurant, an easy marker.

We would go bottle and can hunting all day until we got as many as we could take at one time. We put the glass in the shopping cart and hung extra bags around the cart for cans.

We would, at times, be offered food by people at the park and gladly accepted what was palatable. We also ate plants that didn't require cooking and ate at the mission or a restaurant.

We had a large sleeping bag and an abundance of blankets and warm clothing. We used the shelter of the racquetball courts and collected a bunch of twigs or old coals that could be burned to produce enough heat until we fell asleep. We slept in the same bag to maintain warmth throughout the night.

We used the locker rooms to shower. Frank would wait for me by the door once we knew no one was lurking there. We used the lockers for our clean clothes. We did our laundry at the laundromat about three blocks away.

That was our day, most of the time.

# RECOVERING

## Meet Raina James – vendor, musician, TV show inspiration

by Susan Beckett

Those of you who read the story about Felicia Wilbert in the July issue of Groundcover already know that her daughter, Raina, has been recovering from a horrific shooting incident that occurred in Detroit. What you probably don't know is that the title character in the TV show Nashville was named after our Raina!

One of the show's writers attended Dondero High School in Royal Oak with Raina. She contacted Raina while writing the pilot and asked if she'd mind if they used her name for the country-singer star of the show. Raina, with her characteristic generosity, readily assented.

Our Raina performs as Opulence Wade and has an album she recorded while recovering that is currently in post-production and is expected to drop in October [of 2015]. She and two other musicians have recently formed the group G.I.Y.A Erh and are working on recording projects together. Raina can sing soprano, alto and tenor. She also composes and arranges music, does sound engineering and handles the business side of music production. Visit the Groundcover News Facebook page or website to hear some of Raina's songs.

Much improved since her trauma, Raina recently shared about her path



**Vendor Raina James is back to making music as she recovers from her trauma, and has now relocated out of the area.**

to musicianship. It began when, as a nine-month-old baby, she discovered the cabinet of pots and pans in her grandmother's new townhouse. She'd climb in and sit there drumming on the pots and pans. At 15 months, she entertained the family by singing a ditty she recalls as "Butterscotch." Rhythms pulsed through her three-year-old body as she sat astride her grandmother's boom box, though it eventually broke as she bopped along to the sound. Her grandmother responded by buying a piano and redirecting Raina's musical focus. Raina's cousin wrote the letters

A-G on the corresponding piano keys and Raina started teaching herself to play and read music.

Raina's grandfather, Reverend Samuel Turner, Sr., was the senior minister at the Mayflower Missionary Church in Detroit. Raina was baptized there when she was five and her uncle Terry, the Reverend Mincy, arranged soon after for her to sing in the choir. As she was dependent on adults to drive her there, she could not always get to rehearsal and was kicked out. In response to Raina's extreme distress, her

Aunt Sandra interceded and chided the choir, "Let her sing – she knows all the words!"

The choir relented and Raina not only sang with them for years, she also accompanied them on keyboard. Raina helped form a church youth choir for teens and a children's choir when she was only 10 years old herself. They practiced with percussion performed with silverware on ice cream buckets and ashtrays, accompanied by Raina on keyboard. Her grandmother dedicated a lot of time to fostering this project while her grandfather guided her and prophesied, "Your eyes will see all around the globe."

The journey he predicted began when 12-year-old Raina was among local youth invited to sing gospel songs on *Youth Ministries*, a local TV show. She also began a four-year modeling stint with the Sean John clothing line at that time.

Big changes occurred when Raina was 16. Reverend Turner elected to move to Atlanta, Georgia, and Raina's mother, Felicia, accompanied him. Not wishing to move south, Raina and her grandmother remained in Detroit. The dynamic choir at the Greater Emmanuel Church drew Raina there. She also started singing secular music – rhythm and blues, hip-hop, rap and country.

**see RAINA, page 11**

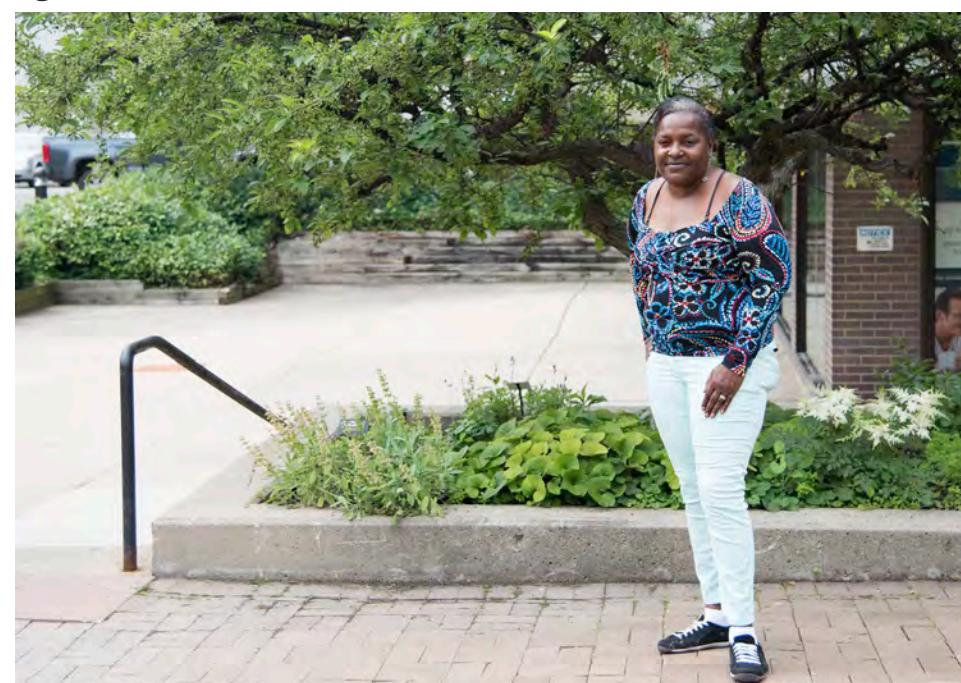
## Family matters brought Felicia, Vendor #234, to Groundcover

by Susan Beckett

Mama Felicia never intended to return to Michigan for more than a visit. But when her daughter was severely injured in a robbery in Detroit in September of 2014, she dropped her life in Florida and high-tailed it here to care for her daughter and grandchild.

Her daughter, recently graduated from college, had come to Detroit to introduce her 8-month-old baby to his great-grandmother and many aunts, uncles and cousins. She ran out of gas after dropping a friend at home so she and a cousin walked to a gas station. On the way back, they were attacked at the corner of Puritan and Waverly. The cousin was shot in the knee and Felicia's daughter took three bullets in the back. One grazed her heart, one hit a lung and the third is still lodged near her spine. She coded twice, suffered a stroke on her right side that affected her memory, both lungs collapsed and she needed 27 bags of blood – but she survived.

After months of care, she was re-



**Vendor Felicia worked several jobs to help get her family back on their feet.**

covering and Felicia moved to Ann Arbor where she could help a cousin with transportation and still visit her daughter weekly. She found odd jobs, including cutting and styling the hair of acquaintances. She heard about Groundcover News and started sell-

ing it as another source of income. She sought services at the Delonis Center but opted not to stay there, preferring a tent on her own, since she is a very light sleeper whose back pain makes it difficult for her to fall back to sleep. Her YMCA membership, at a scholarship

rate, enabled her to do the stretching she needs for her back and to shower regularly.

Given her past, it is easy to see why she is vigilant, even at rest. Her early years were dominated by fear that her father, who had abused her mother, would kidnap her and her siblings. She recalls that, in those years, her mother always dressed all five of them in blue shirts, blue pants, blue socks and brown shoes so it would be easy to describe what they were wearing to the police in the event that he took them.

When she was four, her father showed up at their doorstep and was shot to death by her mother. Later that year, Felicia was accosted in the bathroom of her Headstart classroom by the man known then as "the Detroit rapist." Her screams scared him away.

Resilient, Felicia graduated from Redford High School craving adventure. Felicia has been married and divorced twice and is determined that neither

**see FELICIA, page 11**

## Meet Bridget Martin – freelance cosmetologist and Groundcover vendor

by Darryl Wallender  
Groundcover Vendor #235

Bridget Martin, Groundcover vendor #236, has lived in Ann Arbor for about a year now. A licensed cosmetologist, she first came to Ann Arbor for a job at Zoey and Joey Studio. Zoey and Joey is a salon that specializes in haircuts for kids. Recently she was at Great Clips but has decided to go out on her own.

While building a clientele and getting on her feet, she has also started selling Groundcover News. She enjoys the freedom of being a Groundcover vendor and enjoys the people that she meets. That is what she loves the most – talking to people she meets on the streets.

Groundcover vendors meet so many types of people and hear so many amazing stories. People from all walks of life get the paper. It's heart-warming in so many ways. A lot of people buy the paper two or three times a month just because they know it is a good cause.

But still, Bridget's true passion is doing hair. Even as a child she would cut and style her doll's hair. The poor family dog was even practiced on from time



Groundcover vendor Bridget Martin cut the hair of fellow vendor Tim S. at the daytime warming center last winter.

to time when she was young. You will often catch her standing in front of one of the many salons or barber shops around town watching a haircut being done. She always says you never

stop learning new techniques.

***A haircut can do so many things for a person. It makes you feel better about yourself.***

also helps to build a person's self-es-

Bridget believes that a fresh, new cut and style not only changes the appearance of a client; it

## Kung Fu Panda is her name, staying cool is her game

by Susan Beckett

Cindy, also known as Kung Fu Panda, has added selling expertise to her list of skills. She started as a clueless Groundcover News vendor in July of 2015. She credits Shelley for helping her select selling locations, Lit for sharing sales strategies and Diahann for helping her increase her confidence and be more assertive. Back then, she was pleased if she could sell 150 copies a month. Today she sells more than 600.

This acceleration in sales follows her decision to no longer be a low-income, housing-insecure person, an identity she fell into after returning from Alaska, where she had gone to meet the birth family that had given her up as an infant. While there, she became involved in an abusive relationship with a man who had a teenage daughter. She stayed with him until the daughter turned 18, and then she "jumped off the cliff" and left.

Her birth family still suffered from the alcoholism that resulted in Cindy's Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), so she left them in Alaska and returned to Michigan where she had finished high school. Upon her return, the six people she made friends with were homeless, and Cindy chose to join them rather than impose herself on the parents who



Having once roamed across the country, Cindy is now found all around downtown Ann Arbor selling Groundcover.

raised her. She palled around with this group for over a year.

"They showed me the ropes, especially Ralph, Laurie and Steve," Cindy recollects.

They showed her where to eat – community meals and restaurant back doors on specific days when sympathetic staff was on hand, where and how to get clothes from St. Vincent DePaul, and where to sleep – the Methodist Church.

"It was a really safe location and that's why we picked it," Cindy said. They slept on the side of the church, facing what was then the Campus Inn, because it had enough traffic and light to feel safe but not so much that it was disturbing.

They moved on to tents along the river. After being given 72 hours' notice to leave, they moved half a mile down the river until they were chased again six months later.

team. She feels that it works both ways because every time she gives someone a haircut, her self-esteem raises up a notch just knowing that she made someone else feel better about themselves. It makes her heart smile.

"A haircut can do so many things for a person. It makes you feel better about yourself. It makes you look and feel more put together," Bridget says.

Bridget gave free haircuts to the homeless or anyone who couldn't afford it at the daytime warming center last winter. A lot of people might not think a haircut would do much for a homeless person. But Bridget says this is her way of giving back because so many people in Ann Arbor have helped her since she has moved here. Giving a homeless person a haircut could help them get a job or just make them feel good about the way they look. If that is the case, then she has accomplished her goal.

Bridget's plans for the future are to strengthen and widen her clientele for both hairstyling and Groundcover. She is currently offering at-home haircuts for people or families that can't or don't have the time to get out.

Despite the anxiety that came with forced relocation, Cindy never tried to get a bed at a shelter. She has authority issues and took to heart her friends' cautionary words. "Don't assume the system will work for you," they warned her. "They have huge expectations that are hard to meet. And they don't help you with the baggage that makes you homeless in the first place."

This lack of counseling is especially distressing to Cindy, as she sees it carry over to people who get housing. Their same old problems get hold of them and they often wind up back on the streets. She is also upset about society's "flavor of the month" (or decade) reaction to disabilities. She maintains that it was easy to qualify for Social Security Insurance disability for FAS when she was young, much as it now is for autism. However, she did not apply until her adult years when she found that FAS impeded her ability to work. Her application was denied.

Doubly hit with a disability and homelessness, Cindy has attempted to deal with her problems in a variety of ways. She has difficulty remembering and organizing due to the FAS so she has huge calendars everywhere that she uses to help her.

see KUNG FU PANDA, page 11

# BEHIND THE CRISIS

## Addressing homelessness and poverty in the Black Lives Matter movement

by Elizabeth "Lit" Kurtz  
Groundcover Vendor #159

The Black Lives Matter movement was ignited again when two African American males lost their lives last month at the hands of police. The footage was chilling to watch and, for me as a black woman, reintroduced new fears. "Black Lives Matter" was the cry heard across the land and Ann Arbor was not an exception. With flashing lights, officers whizzed behind and in front of the marchers to ensure calm.

As is so often the case in these countless stories across the media, the major characters were two men, living on the fringes, homeless, and each in his own way, struggling to survive. This is the truth that is so often lost in stories. The homeless crisis is often embedded in a larger narrative, and all-too-often gets overlooked in events like this.

From childhood to his death, Alton Sterling stumbled into society's pitfalls. After his mother died, Alton Sterling knew only an aunt, who served as his parent. At age 20, convicted of sexual misconduct with his then 14-year-old girlfriend, whom he also impregnated, he was like many other men of similar convictions, basically living in exile. No job opportunities, severe housing limitation; he used the resources available to him and sold CDs while he worked as a cook. He was living at a pay-by-the-night shelter at the time of his death.



**The social problems that need to be addressed by the Black Lives Matter movement extend beyond police shootings.**

Homelessness is no stranger to the black community, but while proponents of the Black Lives Matter movement become enraged when a life is lost by a police shooting, that outrage sheds little light on many of the harsh realities that permeate the victims' daily existence.

Black lives matter on so many levels. Not just when we are gunned down, but when standing on the street corner with virtually no hope of returning to a normal existence. Black lives matter when a six-year-old homeless child misses out on learning because she often can't keep up with the rigors of a regular education while her family transitions through housing, let alone get the

enrichment so vitally needed to make a child competitive with more financially stable peers.

Undoubtedly, black lives matter. Not just when there is a shooting by an unjust police officer, but in the seemingly invisible crisis of homelessness that impacts so many lives.

Yet the word "homelessness" in itself has become a word that even the staunchest supporters of other movements tend to minimize and often shun when confronted with it. Even the most compassionate individuals often become reserved, even reticent at the mention of homelessness, seeming to accept that it is just a normal state of affairs. This is not to say that these supporters are disingenuous, but it does suggest they are taking an easy way out.

It was another homeless man who asked Alton Sterling for money while he was selling his CDs. Fearful of being robbed, as another CD seller had been, Alton Sterling had just begun carrying a weapon. He showed it to the man who insisted on asking him for money. And so the call to 911 was placed.

In an instant, Sterling's life went from holding together his barely stable life selling CDs to being surrounded by police whose judgement was biased. It came down to two men, misunderstood by the larger community and certainly by officers lacking in community engagement experience making life-and-death decisions based on preconceived notions.

The officers didn't know that he was a well-known salesman in the area – that he and the store owner shared a business relationship and that this was a part of the livelihood that helped him care for his children. They didn't know that those who bought CDs from him also enjoyed hearing his knowledge

of the various genres of music that he sold. Even though he was a regular in their precinct, they didn't even know his name.

Had the responding officers known their community, they would know that he was amongst those who had rehabilitated their lives inside an unforgiving system. They would be aware that he was a likeable person who cared about nothing more than providing for his family. Had they known that he had survived against countless odds, perhaps their response to the call may have been different.

But his victimization happened long before that day. Even before this incident, most of his life seemed doomed by a system that no longer follows the principle of freedom from restrictions after paying one's debt to society – a system that is hasty to accuse individuals of color of wrongdoing based on perceptions and stereotypes, which also lead to higher incarceration rates. Doomed because sexual offense incarcerations and subsequent restrictions often far outweigh the crime. Doomed because, as the ongoing series by Groundcover publisher Susan Beckett submits, he was guilty of being poor, and – it bears repeating – homeless.

And so while peaceful demonstration is needed, it must be in tandem with concrete action. It certainly requires that we engage with those who are facing housing and food insecurity. It takes the kind of action that ensures that all children have access to quality education, to be able to end all of our crises, whether or not they are part of a movement. It means that we not ignore the extreme importance of our officers and members of the street community coming together to offer solutions for each other's survival.

Perhaps the best tribute to Alton Sterling was his son's passionate plea for peace. He expressed the sentiment that highlights the values which contribute to a more stable society by saying of the resulting police slayings in Dallas, "The police in Dallas, Texas... they didn't deserve that because, nobody knew if they had kids to go home to. Those kids need their parents." Through his pain, he followed up with a request for peace, not violence.

So Cameron Sterling, the oldest surviving son of Alton, has a head start on knowing life's trials. With insight beyond his years he has experienced life with a homeless father who was further victimized by police violence, all while trying to build a better life for him and his young siblings. If he can ask for peace, the very least we can do is heed his cry, and passionately work in our communities to that end.

## Groundcover Vendor Code

While Groundcover News is a nonprofit organization and newspaper vendors are considered contracted self-employers, we still have expectations of how vendors should conduct themselves while selling and representing the paper.

The following list is our Vendor Code of Conduct, which every vendor reads and signs before receiving a badge and papers. We request that if you discover a vendor violating any tenets of the Code, please contact us and provide as many details as possible. Our paper and our vendors should be positively impacting our County.

**All vendors must agree to the following code of conduct:**

- Groundcover News will be distributed for a voluntary donation as suggested by the printed face value of the paper. I agree not to ask for more than face value or solicit donations by any other means.
- I will only sell current issues of Groundcover News.
- I agree not to sell additional goods or products when selling the paper or to panhandle, including panhandling with only one paper.
- I will wear and display my badge when selling papers.
- I will only purchase the paper from Groundcover News Staff and will not sell

to or buy papers from other Groundcover News vendors, especially vendors who have been suspended or terminated.

- I agree to treat all customers, staff and other vendors respectfully. I will not "hard sell," threaten, harass or pressure customers, staff, or other vendors verbally or physically.
- I will not sell Groundcover News under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- I understand that I am not a legal employee of Groundcover News but a contracted worker responsible for my own well-being and income.
- I understand that my badge is property of Groundcover News and will not deface it. I will present my badge when purchasing the papers.
- I agree to stay off private property when selling Groundcover News.
- I understand to refrain from selling on public buses, federal property or stores unless there is permission from the owner.
- I agree to stay at least one block away from another vendor. I will also abide by the Vendor corner policy.

If you see any Groundcover News vendors not abiding by the code of conduct, please report the activity to:  
[contact@groundcovernews.com](mailto:contact@groundcovernews.com)  
734-707-9210

## Back to School – ABCs for all children

by Elizabeth S. Kurtz, aka “Lit”  
Groundcover Vendor #159

September marks the start of school for most children across the country. In the State of Michigan, homeless children will fill up a portion of classroom seats. One has to wonder whether or not the All-American guarantee of a free public education is even realized by a child in these circumstances.

Even with the best policies and intentions, recognizing and servicing the child who is experiencing homelessness is not a simple task. I am personally still haunted by how many times I may have missed this child during the years that I spent teaching in the classroom. Was it the child who excelled in all her work, never missing assignments? Or one of the many who ignored every homework assignment? Was it the one who sat in the back of the classroom, in the middle, the front?

The website [www.classroomcaboodle.com](http://www.classroomcaboodle.com), hosted by Betsy Wiegle, shares some valuable insights. It says, for instance, that the child lacking school supplies or missing a sock is an obvious sign of homelessness. Yet there is the child who may be well-dressed and does not appear homeless at all. In these cases, parents make a concerted effort to mask their circumstances by dressing the child exceptionally well. Wiegle recalls the case where a single mom used the bulk of her meager resources to dress her child in fashionable attire, in an effort to hide the fact that they were living in a tent just outside of town.

A recently published article by the American Psychological Association



**Vendor Lit Kurtz tutoring a student at the Ann Arbor Public Library.**

reveals the trauma that results from a child experiencing homelessness:

*Homeless children confront serious threats to their ability to succeed and their future well-being. Of particular concern are health problems, hunger, poor nutrition, developmental delays, anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, and educational underachievement.*

But while the homeless child can display behavior problems in the classroom, she may also be the one who excels academically and has model behavior. The ABC television program “America Strong” featured such a young man who graduated as valedictorian after citing that his ambition for obtaining superior grades was that he realized that it was his only opportunity to a better life. He recalls going to school with nothing to eat and the challenge of taking important exams while hungry.

His story of hunger is far from unique in the world I inhabit.

After having to live my life basically on the streets for over three years, I have witnessed children born into homelessness. I have seen the formative years of babies marked by instability and poor nutrition. As an individual and an educator, it has been heart-wrenching. While I was unable to always recognize that child during the many years in the classroom, my trek on the streets gave me insight.

Signing up to work as a substitute teacher a couple of years ago, I saw a child that I knew was in an undesirable living situation. At first it was a gnawing recognition that was so similar to my own recent experience. In a child’s way, she was the person that I had become.

As I recall, during snack time in her preschool class, her small hands reached out and took more than twice her share of the segmented fruit and placed them around her plate. At barely

four years of age, she could not suppress the urge to grab all the food she could when it was in her sight – to forage with an almost animalistic instinct to hoard for another day. I winced when the teacher assistant scolded her, pointing out that she always takes more than she needs.

My feeble attempt to defend her outweighed the teacher assistant’s assessment of her as being a “bad” child. I knew that all the scolding and reprimanding this child would not suffice for what she really needed. I knew that she was experiencing the food insecurity that is so common among families experiencing homelessness and poverty, where hunger is never quite satisfied.

Since that day, people have asked me whether or not I plan to return to teaching. I remember that day and think, *how could I?* I see things now that my 25 years of classroom experience never could have revealed. It is heart-wrenching to see a child reading two grades below grade-level because her family has had to spend more effort on survival than on education. To see the lack of stable housing rob a child of her creativity, childhood innocence and zest for life. To hear reports that nearly 25 percent of our children nationwide are experiencing life akin to those who lived through The Great Depression.

My commitment now is to those children and their families – to ensure that during their days, months or years of housing instability, they do not miss out on the fundamental foundation of an education and enrichment opportunities. My mission is to ensure that they have hope for the future, and that through their success they will someday change the world of housing instability that has too long plagued our society.

## Drugs and homelessness

by Elizabeth “Lit” Kurtz  
Groundcover Vendor #159

Another homeless death occurred last month.

The news reported that a 39-year-old man may have died of a drug overdose while trying to live in his tent behind the Amtrak Station.

A day later, a common metanarrative played itself out on my Facebook page when a woman sympathizing with a couple expressed guilt and remorse after she was forced to put them back out into the sub-zero-degree weather upon discovering that, among other things, they were using her diabetic needles to support a drug habit.

One wonders: is it the ravaging effects of drugs that still cause problems in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, or a slow, bureaucratic, under-developed system charged with handling the problem? After all, it is not

uncommon for people with drug addictions to be filtered out of the systems designed to help them. This oxymoronic approach seems self-defeating, since numbers show that drug addictions account for over 40 percent of the homeless population, according to the Washington Post.

This and other problems show up as some of the fundamental flaws that have allowed homelessness to remain a festering blister on society. From drugs to a person’s economic challenges, it becomes obvious that the current system’s approaches are outdated – even defunct. It is time for a complete overhaul in the fight against homelessness. The very term conjures up images that strike negative emotions in most people. From drug addictions to economic problems and everything in between, the current agencies and policies are grossly inept, and certainly no match for the complexities associated with this behemoth we call homelessness.

## Without a check – make ‘em laugh

as told to La Shawn Courtwright  
Groundcover Vendor #56

*(Editor’s note: This is part of a series of investigations into the survival strategies used by people who receive no paycheck or cash assistance. Our thanks to Luke Schaeffer, University of Michigan School of Social Work professor and author of \$2 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America for commissioning these works and generously sharing them with us.)*

I’d normally panhandle with someone with a sign. We use catchy, witty, humorous phrases to get people to laugh at whatever we can find to say at that moment. I then put my hat down and people will give because you enter-

tained them. This, too, usually stops the business owners from calling the cops on us.

I’ve worn the same pair of pants for six months before, so, clothing was the least important element of my survival. I slept behind dumpsters, and white-boxed it (a term used for eating out of the trash). I’ve crashed at places where other street people took me – where everyone was doing drugs and all sorts of dealings for the prospect of making a quick buck. I’ve even washed a car before with my shirt off for \$150 bucks for a person of my same sex, although I would never do that normally.

# MEET YOUR VENDORS

## Meet Pony, vendor #305



Pony, Vendor #305, selling Groundcover News downtown Ann Arbor.

by Maria Hagen  
Groundcover Intern

"I want people to know I'm just trying to survive, trying to make it," Pony said when asked what he thinks the most important thing for people to know about him is. It was the first question of an impromptu interview in the Groundcover News office space at the end of May.

When you look at Pony or talk with him, you wouldn't think he has been to prison, let alone spent a significant amount of time there, but he committed his first offense – breaking and entering – at the age of 20. It was the first in a series of crimes committed and sentences served.

Born on the north side of Detroit, Pony lived with his mother until he was about seven or eight. "She was a good person, nice. She used drugs, but she was good," he said.

In spite of this, Pony was taken to a boys' home because of neglect, or child abuse. He remained in boys' homes until the age of 18.

"It was like being in an institution," Pony said. "A bunch of boys, and you're not with real family. You get introduced to the wrong crowd. They were mostly juvies."

He also had friends outside of the home with whom he went to different shows.

Despite growing up in the boys' home, Pony managed to stay in touch with an aunt, Gloria Jean. "We were real tight," Pony said. "She was like a mother to me." Since then Pony has lost touch with her and her daughter, who passed

***"I want people to know I'm just trying to survive, trying to make it."***

away while he was in prison.

He has also lost touch with his sister, Neta, who is two years older. "Our birthdays are two days apart in the same month," Pony told me. We broke off the interview to see if we could find her online, but our search was unsuccessful. Pony wants to reconnect with his family.

The nickname "Pony" came from a group of guys he hung around with for a while. "They called me Pony and I stuck with it," he said. "I was selling drugs at the time."

In the late 1970s, Pony made his way to Ann Arbor and since then he has remained, off-and-on – when he was

not in prison – working at Kroger or Holiday Inn. As soon as he got out – after spending 18 years in prison – he went to Washtenaw County Community Mental Health in order try and get a state ID.

It was difficult for Pony to even obtain his birth certificate – and without an ID, jobs are extremely difficult to find. Rania, a Groundcover News social work intern, eventually helped him work through the process.

Groundcover News became a part of Pony's life when he met Kung Fu Panda, a nickname of another vendor, at the Delonis Center shelter in Ann Arbor. She walked by as we were talking and made sure that Pony remembered that. "I took him on my wing," she said, as Pony laughed.

Pony has no permanent living space and is spending his nights at the Delonis Center. He is currently looking for jobs in landscaping so that he can afford a better place to live.

## Meet Paula Anderson, vendor #157

by Kaitlin Schuler  
U-M Student Contributor

Paula Anderson has been a Groundcover vendor for a little over a year, but her life in Ann Arbor began when she was three years old. She was born in Fort Dodge, Iowa, but her father moved her family to Ann Arbor a few years after her birth. Anderson attended Pioneer High School for two years, but ended up graduating from a high school in northern Michigan, with a class of only 125 students.

Anderson found out about Groundcover in a way that many of our vendors do: from another vendor. "When I was in the shelter last year, I knew Peggy was doing it," she said, "so I came in, too, and started selling papers."

Though many Groundcover vendors like to have a certain spot they try to sell at regularly, aside from her weekend mornings at the Village Kitchen, Anderson has been switching up her selling points lately. "I used to sell at Mighty Good Coffee," she explained. "But now I usually sell at Starbucks or the [People's Food] Co-op. I sold at the church on Sunday, too, and that worked out really well."

Anderson currently lives in Ypsilanti, but offered some advice for vendors and others who still struggle with housing. "They just need to try to work, and check out the shelters," she said. "You need to know what the rules are for the shelters, and just make sure to really try to stick to them."

After a year of selling Groundcover, Anderson also had some good advice for new Groundcover vendors or ones having some trouble selling. "It's all in your attitude and how you approach



Paula is dressed for winter waiting to sell at the People's Food Co-op.

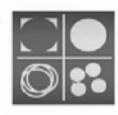
people," Anderson shared. "I mainly sell the Groundcover for extra money. It helps me give my daughter a little help, since I have two grandbabies. So I'm treating selling Groundcover like a real job, and it is."

Her daughter lives out-of-state, but Anderson likes to keep up with her and her children via Facebook. "I used to bowl, too, for fun," she explained, "but I can't now that my back went out."

Right now, Anderson is learning to be a writer and going to group therapy. "My dad never forced us to read," she said, "but I try my best to learn how to read and spell, so I can be a writer."

Life might not always go the way Anderson would like – she has a lost a few friends to drug use, among other hardships, and struggles with her health – but she tries to keep her head up and keep doing good things. "I try my best to be a good person and a good vendor," Anderson said. "Sometimes life gets in the way, but I try my best."



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## Damaged lives

### continued from page 5

Despite my experiences with human and social service providers, I started to trust my friend's advice and made an appointment to see a psychiatrist and it has changed my life. My diagnosis and abuse history put me as a priority because I was at risk for further ills to take place. I had been on a low-income housing list for nine years before then. I received housing two weeks later and was prescribed a medication to treat my disorders. I need and will use these opportunities to build a better and brighter future. It has been a long, tedious, and trying journey, yet I'm here, and may now live out my dreams and expectations of myself. I don't have the desire for alcohol anymore; I never thought I'd be saying that. It no longer has the pull on me it once did.

I owe thanks first and foremost to my higher power, and a host of close, caring, true friends and professionals. I thank you Susan, Sandy, Rissa (R.I.P.), Leonore and Dave who helped me with my probation costs in 2012. You all have been "my family" in many tight squeezes. I could not have done this without your genuine and unconditional love for me. I love my mom always; she's why I am who I am. We've hit a few bumps, but I love

## Meet Raina James

### continued from page 6

She sang backup for other groups and sold one of her beats for a commercial.

Meanwhile, Felicia was in a bus accident and returned to Detroit to recover when Raina was 18. Observing that the local music scene came with some dangerous norms to which Raina was succumbing, Felicia intervened. Raina had been expelled from high school for fighting and was selling – but not using – drugs.

Raina describes her mother as "a dedicated woman and awesome person. She made sure I wouldn't want or need for anything in life. She gave me love, spirituality, attention... She believed in me."

As the oldest child charged with helping care for her younger siblings, Felicia never finished school herself. She was determined that Raina would not be held back by a lack of education. Raina had received her GED at 17 but lost the certificate. When she tried to get another copy, she learned that the granting institution had been a fraud. Thanks to Felicia's insistence, Raina attended the Highland Park Career Academy and received her diploma when she was

her deeply. I have my passion to write because she read to me and taught me to write. You all loved me until I could learn to love myself more.

I want to thank Mrs. Katie McCormick-Deaton for helping me to tear down walls I surrounded myself in and allow me peel some of the layers to get to the core. I'm so grateful for the heartfelt letter to my judge and the prosecutors. She suggested that I be treated with dignity and respect while giving a concise account of my history. I believe that Mrs. McCormick-Deaton has gone on to child psychology. I think that this is an excellent choice. If you can reach a child, they have a better chance to become productive adults. I know this for sure from experience.

Although my judge is greatly biased and may think I'm rude, I just want to tell my own history, not some Pre-Sentence Inference (PSI), or a police report that often exaggerates an incident; I say this with all due respect, because I'm more than black and white. I am an example of true human spirit.

I'm writing my autobiography and hope to publish it within a year.

21, while simultaneously establishing herself in the local music scene.

Felicia designated some of the money received as a settlement from the accident to pay for a college education for Raina, though Raina was happy with the life she had. Raina says, "My mom kicked my behind to get me out and go to college – literally. I wore a black eye to my first semester at Blue Sail University."

Four years later, at age 26, Raina emerged with dual degrees in Music Production and Entertainment Business. Armed with an education and talent, she felt ready to support herself and start a family. She picked a man to father her child and was delighted when her son Malachi was born. It was on a visit to introduce the baby to the Detroit relatives that the shooting occurred.

The shooter is still at large and Raina suffers anxiety and nightmares. She hopes they will subside upon her impending return to Florida where she will mentally and physically heal, pursue music, look into modeling for Malachi and reunite Malachi with his father.

## Felicia, Vendor #234

### continued from page 6

she nor her daughter will be dependent on a man.

She left Detroit at the age of 23 and lived for years in California where she bartered with a friend from Africa whom she taught to drive in exchange for lessons on braiding hair. Felicia learned she could braid fastest when she closed her eyes.

"A blind man has more agility," she claims.

Felicia lived briefly in Las Vegas, Georgia where she was the head cook at a convalescent home. In 2003, she moved back to Detroit where she acquired a Dollar Store – which evolved into a thrift store – and seven houses, most of which she rented out. Disgusted with the high property taxes, crime and difficulty in getting good tenants, she walked away from all of them in 2012. Felicia settled in Florida where she refurbished and managed a Tune and

## Kung Fu Panda

### continued from page 7

She moderates her emotions with her martial arts training:

"I am a very cool-headed person because of my martial arts training. You learn to suspend reality and not put yourself in an emotional state if someone is attacking you. Today I am having a bad day, so I just did karate on homelessness. I'm going to take my heart and put it on top of that building and I'll just gut it out and sell my papers. I don't know why people have to be so mean sometimes," Cindy said.

"You learn to face the enemy head-on and not internalize negativity. I had a huge insecurity and fear of what people would think of me based on my being homeless. Once a group of college students stood across from where I was selling and stared and laughed at me.

Lube gas station and market in Apopka.

Felicia enjoys the challenge of selling Groundcover News and the opportunity to make people smile every day. She embraced the challenge of establishing new sales areas in Pittsfield Township and sold regularly at the exit of the Kroger on Carpenter Rd.

"If I see someone holding a paper, I sing, 'My paper's better than your paper, my paper's better than yours...' I like to see people happy. No matter what problems I am going through, I try to be happy," Felicia says.

Felicia is saving up her money so she and her daughter and grandchild can relocate someplace safe and warm come fall.

"Don't look past the person. It costs nothing to give a smile. It is our job every day to give love, show love and receive love" – this is the philosophy Felicia has developed in life and in selling Groundcover News.

It cut me to the core. They don't know my background or anything about me. Now I kill them with kindness or totally block them out," Cindy continued.

When she revealed her status as a four don in Budjikan taught by Ninjutsu Otto Cardue, a new friend from the Occupy Movement exclaimed, "I have the perfect street name for you because you are always so happy. You're Kung Fu Panda; you're so cool!" And it stuck.

Cindy has reconnected with her family and become an elite salesperson. As such, she has priority at a corner of her choosing. Her short-term goal is to continue selling at least 600 papers each month so she can retain that status. Ultimately, she would love to put her artistic talent and education to good use and work in an art gallery, wrapping paintings and assisting customers.



ANN ARBOR YMCA  
400 West Washington Street  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48103  
[www.annarborymca.org](http://www.annarborymca.org)

## JOIN HERE IT'S GOOD FOR THE HEART

At the Y, we exist to strengthen community. Together with people like you, we nurture the potential of kids, help people improve their health, and provide opportunities to support our neighbors. So join our cause. And create meaningful change not just for your family, but also for your community.



## IN MEMORIAM

### The loss of Rissa Haynes, April 6, 1957 – November 12, 2015

Our friend and Groundcover News co-worker, Rissa Haynes, passed away on Thursday, November 12, 2015 at the University of Michigan hospital. Feeling poorly, she was transferred there a week earlier from MediLodge of Plymouth, where she had been recovering from a stroke and bone infection. She suffered a heart attack while in the hospital, entered a coma-like state and succumbed several days later with her son, Chancler, by her side.

One month before, on October 13, she was optimistic about being released and returning home by Thanksgiving. Optimism was Rissa's trademark trait. She called herself "an incurable optimist" and asserted that "I'm the kind of person who goes after Moby Dick with my tartar sauce."

"I love people. I love talking to people," Rissa said in an August, 2011 interview with Vicki Elmer, published in the Ann Arbor Observer. Her optimism came from her faith in God and her belief in the Bible verses that promise all things will work for the good. But "I'm not sitting around and saying, 'The Lord's going to take care of me,'" she continued. Instead, she worked on her life goals, which included completing a master's degree and teaching others how to use computers.

She was bold, spunky, forward-thinking and determined. Beset by circumstances that would have left many of us huddled in a corner, Rissa repeatedly turned tragedy into triumph, bringing as many others up with her as she could.

Though her parents eventually split up, Rissa was raised in a loving family and stayed close with her mother, Evelyn Haynes, and brothers, Robert and Rodrick Hopkins, to the end.

As a talented musician and good student, Rissa was pursuing a dual major in college when her son was conceived. Her family supported her in having and raising the baby. Rissa managed to finish college while her son was young but dropped music in favor of the more practical program of computers in business applications.



Rissa and her son, Chancler Haynes, eventually moved to Texas where she worked for Frito Lay and then Texas Instruments in the testing department. When Chancler left for college, she spent her nights hunched over a computer, working on her master's degree. And that's when her health problems began.

Doctors were never able to pinpoint the source of the problems but her legs and hands eventually became unresponsive. As western medicine provided no diagnosis or cure, Rissa turned to natural remedies and chiropractic medicine – from which she did get some relief. Unfortunately, these treatments were not covered by insurance.

She returned to Michigan to assist her mother but was too infirm herself to be helpful. The cold weather and absence of treatment worsened her symptoms. She found herself new alternative doctors but was eventually impoverished by the medical costs.

It was at a Community Kitchen meal that Rissa heard about Groundcover News. She immediately grasped the business model and embraced the opportunity to be a self-employed entrepreneur. She went on to become a member of the Groundcover News Board of Directors.

Rissa's mobility was so limited at first that she could not turn quickly enough to intercept a potential client – so she found other ways to succeed. Her ingenious displays attracted a loyal customer base at the People's Food Co-op, St. Francis of Assisi Church and Bethel

United Church of Christ (BUCC). She sold yearly subscriptions. She wrote numerous articles. Her infectious smile and chocolate eyes brimming with love drew people to her.

Rissa's condition improved for a year or so but more setbacks ensued and she frequently found herself in the hospital or a recovery facility. Visits from BUCC parishioners and Groundcover friends during those times meant so much to her. She was also so appreciative of the Avalon Carrot Way apartment and support she received last year through the FUSE program.

Though she was no longer able to play piano, Rissa retained her love of music. She enthusiastically attended concerts at BUCC, bringing along her mother

whenever possible. A natural mentor, she especially appreciated the nurturing of young performers.

Rissa lived by the words she shared with Eva Hattie Schuler, a reporter for the Community High School *The Communicator*: "Just bloom where you're planted. Be grateful for what you do have, 'cause if you focus on what you don't have, you become bitter. You control your brain. Take the perspective [that] there's always a silver lining in every cloud. If you focus on the cloud, you'll get rain. If you focus on the silver lining, you'll be able to get the positive aspects."

Rissa lit up the room with her smile and the world with her positivity and love. We all ache with missing her.

### Remembering Cheryl Greeley



**by Elizabeth "Lit" Kurtz  
Groundcover Vendor #159**

Cheryl was beautiful. I don't say that because she is gone. But she was. Despite the illness and other life challenges that disrupted her life, whenever I saw her she had a gloss on her lips and a smile that brought out the twinkle in her eyes. Her pleasant demeanor always took me to a more innocent place – perhaps where women balanced flower baskets on the handlebars of their bikes and were carefree. She traveled, it seemed effortlessly, between church dinners and sleeping jaunts as if the road were made for a bike such as hers.

For some time, her selling venue was Depot Town in Ypsilanti. She would sometimes complain about business being slow, or of being ignored, but she remained in Ypsilanti. She sometimes reminisced about her years working at Hello Faz Pizza.

Cheryl never smoked or drank and always took the time to put on makeup and a nice outfit. She shared her home with four cats who have been adopted by her friend, Donna. Cheryl's family

recalled her joy at sharing presents with them and they credit her with making the best caramels, a highlight of annual Christmas visits.

She always seemed to make it to Pizza in the Park, the regular Friday night gathering in Liberty Park. Cheryl would show up on her bike as though it were a Rolls Royce. There she would find fellowship, enjoying pizza from the Vineyard Ministry and the company of close friends, before restocking her supply of papers to sell in the upcoming week.

Cheryl regularly parked her bike outside Bethlehem Church on the first Thursday of the month to join in our monthly paper reviews. Her review was consistent, never wavering from examining the coupons that could be selling points.

Her absence creates a void that will not be replaced in our meetings. Pizza in the Park will seem empty without her being there. Her quaint, affable manner of surviving made an impact on our lives at Groundcover News, and for that we are truly thankful.

# VENDOR REALITY RETROSPECTIVE

# GROUNDCOVER

## NEWS AND SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUND UP

### SECTION TWO

SPECIAL ISSUE 2017

### Cuba to Ann Arbor, vendor Roberto Caballero is always on the move

by Susan Beckett

Roberto I. Caballero, vendor #347, is not afraid to strike out for new places – by foot, helicopter or boat. Nor does he hesitate to ask questions. That is how he made his way from Cuba to Ann Arbor, with many stops along the way.

He has been in Ann Arbor since July. He started selling Groundcover News after encountering long-time Groundcover volunteer Sandy Schmoker at the St. Andrew's breakfast where she was selling papers to existing vendors and encouraging those looking for work to give Groundcover News a try. Roberto has since become a fixture at the corner of Main and Washington where he sells Groundcover approximately 10 hours each day. When it opens, he comes to the Groundcover office for a cup of coffee and to restock his supply of papers and bumper stickers.

Sometimes he takes breaks for a meal at the Delonis Center or local restaurant where Spanish is spoken, or to visit the PORT outpost of Community Services and Treatment Support to work on re-storing his identity papers and regaining his green card. Roberto is proud that he has worked his whole life and is anxious to be able to pursue broader employment opportunities again. In the meantime, he is grateful to have money in his pocket, a bike and a bike-trailer he fashioned from a golf pull-cart on which he carries his bedding and belongings.

Roberto left Cuba in 1980 when he was 21 years old. There was a rare opportunity to leave Cuba in April of 1980 as a downturn in the economy caused widespread discontent. When 10,000 Cubans took refuge in the Peruvian embassy and asked for asylum, Fidel Castro responded by saying that anyone who wanted to could leave. Roberto was one of the 125,000 who jumped at the opportunity for a better life and came to the United States as part of the Mariel boatlift. His brother was among those who left Cuba for Peru. Their sister had already emigrated to the United States, thanks to a lucky lottery win.



Vendor Roberto fashioned a trailer from a golf handcart to hold his possessions until he gets housing.

After Roberto's boat landed in Miami, he was flown to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, one of four centers where the refugees without Miami-area relatives were placed until a sponsor could be found for them. One year later, Roberto was returned to Miami where he had been sponsored by the Catholic Church. They helped him find a place to stay and a job as a field hand, picking tomatoes and oranges at minimum wage. About eight months later, he found a better job as a construction laborer.

Looking for a better life, he used his savings to travel to Chicago where he has an uncle. Dismayed by the winter weather, he then tried Rochester, New York where his sister had settled, unaware that it is also a northern city. His next stop was Las Vegas, Nevada where he worked as a dishwasher in a casino for about a year. Towards the end of that time, while he was in the parking lot on a break, he met Dolores, a Mexican-American woman vacationing from Arizona. They chatted in Spanish and hit it off. They kept in touch by phone and Roberto eventually moved to Guadalupe, Arizona at her invitation.

They married and had a daughter, Kitt, and Roberto eventually opened his own landscaping business. After 26 years and three hernia operations, the economic downturn destroyed the business and Roberto and his wife grew apart. Feeling the need to be on his own again, Roberto left. He stayed with his brother (who had relocated from Peru) in Idaho for a little while then he hopped a bus to Spokane, Washington. The Salvation Army helped him settle there and arranged for another hernia operation. Two years later, Roberto was on the move again.

He once again visited his uncle in Chicago, then traveled back to Miami and on to Orlando where he worked for a year as an apartment maintenance man. He returned to Chicago by train, via Miami, and his wallet was taken while he slept on the train. He found himself out of money and unable to find work, largely because his green card had been in his wallet.

A Mexican-American he met told him of a work opportunity in Griffith, Indiana, so Roberto set off on foot for the 30 mile walk to Griffith. He worked the three-month construction job there and then started walking east looking

for more work. Nearly 200 miles later, he found a shelter in Jackson, Michigan. People at the shelter advised Roberto to go the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) office in Battle Creek to get his green card restored.

He walked the 50 miles there only to discover that Battle Creek had a Homeland Security office, not INS. Homeland Security redirected him to the INS office in Detroit. Roberto walked back to Jackson where someone mentioned that the best place in Michigan was Ann Arbor, and it was on the way to Detroit. Roberto made the relatively short walk of 36 miles to Ann Arbor. He arrived in July, one month after leaving Griffith.

Asking around, he found his way to the Delonis Center and learned there about the daily breakfasts at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. One Tuesday morning as he breakfasted there, he conversed with Groundcover News volunteer Sandy Schmoker who was selling papers to existing vendors. She gave him information about becoming a Groundcover vendor himself. He quickly embraced the self-employment opportunity.

Roberto recently got his driver's license and several other pieces of identification from Arizona and will soon travel to Detroit for an interview with the INS. Although he wouldn't hesitate to walk, thanks to the sales he's made to his Groundcover customers he has the seven dollars to take the bus or 11 dollars to take the train.

Throughout his journey, Roberto has kept in touch with his family and sent money back to Arizona.

"I left my old lady but not my daughter and grandsons," Roberto says frequently.

While he muses that he might settle in Ann Arbor permanently, he might yet find himself pulled toward family again.

# VENDOR'S PERSPECTIVE

## More than selling papers

by Olivia Perfetti  
U-M Student Contributor

Every single person on this planet has a story. People interact in many ways, but rarely do we have the chance to learn things about people below the surface level. Sometimes, though, all it takes is a simple conversation.

How much do you know about the person who sold you this newspaper? Even if you talked for a couple minutes, there's still more to learn. Here's a little about two of Groundcover's vendors and the work they do.

Some vendors have worked for Groundcover for years. I interviewed one vendor who started selling papers in 2013. Over the last several years, she has learned the ins and outs of selling and has planned out a solid working schedule.

"Much of it is different from when I first started. When I first started there was no rhyme or reason. I would get up and stand in different corners. Now I sell in [the same place] most days. I sell [there] from about 8-9:30 and then I move further into town. And then I go back to sell in the evenings. I'm a writer. [Being an independent contractor] gives me time to do my writing and work on some other projects. I'm trying to put out a rap album. But every day I try to get out and sell. I sometimes don't when it's raining; [instead] I do office work. I write and try to get my eBay business up."

Selling newspapers efficiently is clearly a skill, and one that this particular vendor has gotten better at over time. Participating in workshops with Joe Woods, another experienced vendor who is now also the sales coordinator, has also been helpful to her.

"Since I've worked with Joe, my approach is different. My sales grew dramatically when I started asking [direct questions]. I might say different things: have you gotten the paper yet, do you know about Groundcover, may I ask you a question?"

Unfortunately, not everybody responds politely to these questions.

"Most people ignore me. A lot of people say 'No, thank you.' A few people imply that I'm not actually working. For the most part, the response is pretty nice. I think we've come to a place where people aren't that mean anymore. It's just really bad when people ignore me."

The impoliteness may partly result from ignorance and society's lack of understanding of homelessness.

"In all fairness, I don't think some people have a sense of the direction homeless aid should be going. The whole mindset has to shift. I think people have the wrong perception of who the homeless are. There just needs to be a paradigm shift. We're really behind in understanding the issues of homelessness in society. A lot of the time people will only respond if something is on the media. Everybody gives to that person when the media brings it up."

"There is also blatant stereotyping. [The most common one is] that people who are homeless are lazy and that we're not victims. [In truth], we are victims and people need to recognize that. And I have no idea where it started. It's persisted into a lot of generations."

She says that one of the best ways to understand homelessness is by getting involved with Groundcover.

"For vendors, it [Groundcover] is a tremendous opportunity to become an independent contractor and your own person. It's a lot of work but if you're willing to put in the work and the discipline it can be the means to an end. It's a way to get immediate income. For volunteers, it's a way to learn first-hand about homelessness so you can begin to shed some of the stereotypes that exist," she says.

When I asked her about the relationships she has formed as a result of Groundcover, she replied: "We're pretty much a family. We have bonds here. It hasn't come easy. We've lost people. We lost someone recently, she just passed this year. And she was part of our family."

While many members of the Groundcover family have been around for years, other vendors have joined quite recently. Kevin Spangler has been a vendor for Groundcover for about two months. He found out about Groundcover from other vendors several years ago, and he has recently found time to sell newspapers and also write for Groundcover between his three other jobs. Kevin washes dishes at Mezzavino restaurant four days a week and also works at Silvio's Organic Ristorante and Pizzeria three days a week. When he has time in the day, he does construction work for a client who is remodeling a house.

**see SELLING, page 3**

## Canines of Ann Arbor



Pauline rests with one of the many dogs who have become her friends in downtown Ann Arbor.

by Pauline B.  
Groundcover Vendor #351

Hi! I love my job at Groundcover. I love all the nice people I meet. I especially love all my doggy friends. They are so sweet and beautiful; some are so cute, most adorably affectionate. They are special in my heart. They don't act like they're too good for me, they don't give me hateful looks, they don't ignore me, but instead act happy when I pet them.

They're the canines of Ann Arbor, walking the streets with their kind owners, who take good care of them and generously share their time and doggies with others. I've seen huge amounts of joy on people's faces as they pet their wonderful animals – the therapy pets of Ann Arbor.

I saw one lady hold someone's fluffy little dog, and you could see so much happiness in her face as she told the owners of the little dog how lonely she was, and how grateful she was to hold their dog.

How could anyone abuse an animal? They have feelings and emotions, just as people do. They get depressed, scared, lonely, happy, and attached to others, just as people do. Dogs are intelligent, loving, and show gratitude.

How can people in certain countries kill and eat these wonderful creatures? Dogs have great value as companions, rescuers, crime fighters and therapy pets. My hope is that everyone everywhere will be as kind to their own dogs

and all dogs as the Ann Arbor downtown residents are to their canines. And my hope also is that people safely neuter their pets to prevent the abuse of killing the unwanted ones.

If I had the pleasure of owning a dog I would give it distilled water and food without grain, potatoes, or chemicals in it. In the wild, canines don't eat grains or vegetables. If we big humans are better off with filtered water, how much more would the smaller body of a dog be affected in a negative way by chemicals in water and food?

Thank you canines of downtown Ann Arbor for your love and the joy you bring others. Thank you owners of these wonderful creatures for taking the time to stop and let us enjoy your valuable pets. You are very special messengers of kindness, love, and joy.

## When you do crack

by Paula Anderson  
Groundcover Vendor #157

When you do crack  
you really need to get back  
on track  
or you may never get back  
before you get an attack  
and end up in a sack  
that will be tacked.

## Benbo: healthy food and economic empowerment

by Elizabeth "Lit" Kurtz  
Groundcover Vendor # 159

I often marvel at young people rushing to class, passing the crisis of homelessness on their way. Despite the enormity of the crisis, no educational centers of higher learning seem to grasp their role in providing the educational tools to end it. From elementary through post-graduate education, the current curricula prance around the crisis of homelessness showing little concern for or awareness of its depth.

This may soon change due to the efforts of a trio of University of Michigan students who took on the subject of homelessness during a recent campus competition. Innovation in Action is an annual event put on by the School of Public Health. It brings together some of the brightest, intellectual young minds of our times and provides access to tools to realize their passions for social change.

Inspired by Groundcover News' model of empowerment, these three students from diverse disciplines came together to bring to life a food product which would not only serve the public healthy meals, but empower those experiencing homelessness. Team members included: Master's candidate in Health Administration Quan Pham; Minhee Choi, Master's Candidate in the School Social Work; and Lawrence Yong from the School of Information. Their energy was unparalleled by any I have seen during my entire stint of homelessness.

The concept of their design, benbo lunch, is to combine the elements of social change with the purchase of a healthy, convenient meal. Borrowed from the Japanese style bento boxes, the name of their product is an abbreviation of bento and box. Hence, the name *benbo*. As Quan Pham stressed to me, the concept behind it is to make people feel good about purchasing an item that is tasty and healthy while at the same time having a social impact. The message that accompanies the benbo lunch is concise and appealing: *eat good. feel good. benbo.*

I was honored to be chosen to participate in the pilot phase, demonstrating how the benbo lunch system will work. The team's five months of research and market analysis combined with painstaking preparation was clearly evident. This allowed me to fit seamlessly into their design model. A pre-sales survey revealed that future customers would enjoy the product if the elements of cleanliness, trustworthiness and friendliness were in place.

For two days, I prepped food in a professional kitchen. And for two days, I

sold the benbo lunches to students and faculty near the South University side of the Diag. Even with a slight increase in the number of boxes available on the second day, the benbo lunches sold out in under two hours on both days.

**Day 1:** This first market test was to determine if the benbo lunches would sell at a set price of \$6.00. Result: all 30 lunches sold out in under two hours.

**Day 2:** The benbo lunches sold for whatever the customer wanted to pay. Result: all 42 boxes sold in under two hours, but with an increase in profit and in total lunches sold on the second day.

Along with the delicious arrangement of organic dumplings, edamame beans, teriyaki chicken, and tofu stir-fry, each customer was asked to participate in an online survey. The online survey responses revealed that:

- people were unfazed by an interaction with a homeless individual
- many were unaware that there was a homeless individual selling
- the food was delicious and they would purchase again
- the average price recommended through the survey was \$8.00

I attended the competition along with Team Benbo and waited with nervous anticipation to see if they would make it to the final round. As the last team name was called out, it was evident that Team Benbo would not continue on. It was heart-wrenching to accept that the crestfallen group would walk away with nothing tangible to show for their five months of effort.

There were 12 teams in all and the three that won presented state-of the art solutions to problems that might otherwise not be addressed. The result was no less than awe-inspiring.

First Place and the Audience Choice Award went to Team FreshFridge, which presented a mobile app that allows consumers to accurately track the foods in the fridge and their expiration dates. I got the sense that it will work intuitively with our refrigerators to save the 40 percent of food that we toss out.

Team Confluence Health took second place with an app that will help ease the burden of Community Health Workers by allowing better communication and coordination between these health providers and physicians. The impact of such an app will ultimately lead to time and cost savings and improved health care, especially for vulnerable populations.

Third Place went to Team Ditto. As the clever name suggests, it connects people who are dealing with the same (often invisible) illnesses. Their app takes the guesswork out of finding a support network of people who have the same struggles.

As the event neared its close and the top teams took to the stage to take their award money, Team Benbo and the other remaining teams were adjusting bravely to their defeat. I prepared myself for the closing remarks. I could still sense disappointment. I knew there were lingering questions: What should we have done differently? How could I help answer the myriad questions that inevitably would follow their loss?

Almost intuitively, the speaker helped put meaning behind the feelings of consolation that I desperately needed to give at that moment. One word in particular caught my attention so that I actually stopped and listened intently to the remainder of the program. As if his prepared remarks were tailor-made for Team Benbo, he offered advice that was all-too-poignant and relevant. Yes, I heard correctly. He used the word *subversive*. He reminded the small audience that creativity and originality often means that one often has to be subversive.

That one must often be subversive in forging new paths of creativity and originality defined Team Benbo. While their able competitors clearly helped improve on existing areas of concern, and will undoubtedly bring valuable innovations to current mainstream issues, homelessness still remains a largely uncharted path. Perhaps without

being aware, this team had dared to be subversive. To stretch the limitations of what defines public health. To dream that their idea would have impact on our world, on future generations.

As they walked away, I could still sense their disappointment. Had they won, they planned on getting the first two lunch carts up and going over the summer. They had dreamed how these GPS-tracked carts would eventually be a part of our daily lives, just as Groundcover is... how they would branch out to other cities who sell street papers, using the street paper concept as a path to "market entry."

I, for one, have hope that their dream will not be lost; that they will continue to pitch their plan to more and more people. Not only would such a business help people such as me, but it begins to open diverse empowerment opportunities for those who struggle through homelessness.

In the end I felt blessed to have given witness to such an event. I was honored that they used me as their model. I walked away with a new sense of hope that all is not lost and that young adults who are preparing to take over the reins of our society have the vision combined with the aptitude to bring viable solutions to a crisis that many seem to have forgotten.

With the ingenuity and passion of bright minds such as these, I have no doubt that in the very near future, we may witness the following conversation: Homelessness? Sure. There's an app for that.

## More than selling papers

**continued from page 2**

Most days for Kevin begin at five or six in the morning at the shelter where he sleeps. Kevin's morning routine consists of breathing exercises, prayer, and motivational videos on YouTube. On a "Groundcover day," Kevin heads over to the farmers' market between seven and eight to sell newspapers. He does what he can to stay warm: sometimes push-ups, lunges, and squats.

"It's pretty slow for the first few hours. For the first hour I go around and scope out the best vegetables of the venue. Sometimes you get good deals if you wait until the very end," Kevin says.

Kevin usually sells newspapers until two or three in the afternoon, or until he runs out of papers. He says he works hard to provide for the baby that he and

his girlfriend, Cynthia – also a Groundcover vendor – had recently. Kevin met Cynthia while working as a marketer for Liberty Tax. Kevin played the role of Uncle Sam, while Cynthia was Lady Liberty.

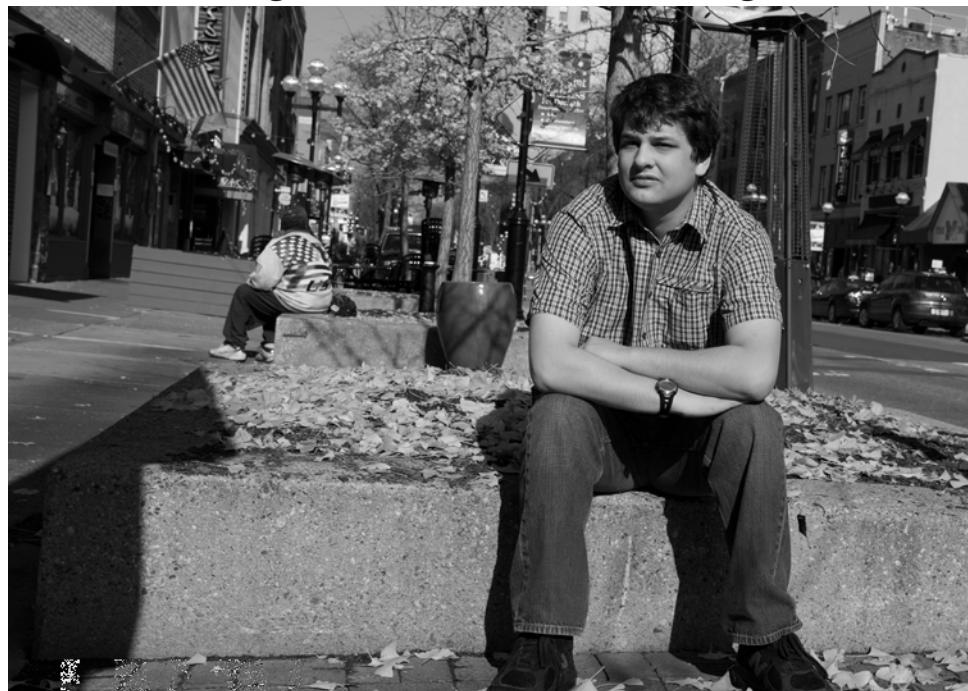
As for Groundcover, "I decided to get into it because I have sold things in the past and I thought this was a great avenue for me. The writing part was an accident," Kevin said. He went on to suggest volunteer opportunities. "Bringing in food for the vendors or putting advertisements in the newspaper for your local business can go a long way."

Kevin has other goals besides providing for his baby. For one, he aims to become an impactful motivational

see SELLING, page 4

# MAKING CHANGE

## In the rough – a homeless night



Keagan spent one sleepless night with his friends who sleep on the streets.

by Keagan Irrer  
Groundcover Contributor

Last spring I went out to one of the homeless camps with a trusted friend who lived in it, intending to spend the night there. It was on the edge of the city, a small camp, only a few tents. It was at least ten minutes' walk, through scrub and gravel, through land that nobody was using. I followed my friend silently in the darkness, trepidation growing with each step.

When I arrived, there was only a ragged sleeping bag for me on the hard ground under the bridge – no tent. My friend didn't have one at the time, either; we were both sleeping in the open. We had the fortune of a rainless night, but it was damp, and still grew cold enough that I would spend much of the night curled in a ball, trying and failing to retain my own warmth.

I had a choice between hard, knobbed ground, and even harder pavement. I would shift back and forth between the two all night, entirely unable to sleep. The ground had little knobby stones that pressed into my skin, delivering their sharp pain anew with each movement of my body.

At about two-thirty in the morning, an argument arose; with the viciousness of the yelling and the fury of the invective, I wondered if it was wise for me to stay. Apparently someone had made enough noise to awaken someone else, and they were quite displeased. I tried to ignore it, but it was impossible – I believe the entire camp was awoken.

But after about 10 minutes they settled down, and the rest of the night passed uneventfully. I gave up on trying to actually get any sleep; the ground was simply too uncomfortable, and it was getting too cold out. Screwing my

eyes shut, and curling myself into the most comfortable ball I could muster, I waited for dawn.

My friend awoke in relatively good spirits. He'd slept far better than I, being accustomed to the conditions. I was stiff and sore, aching, entirely miserable, but glad to have made it through the night. He listened to some music while having a smoke, saying he would go into town, and I was welcome to continue spending time with him. I, however, decided I'd had enough.

I went home.

But all the way there, I kept thinking: the people I left in the camp could not. They didn't have anywhere to go. Nobody with a choice would live there; the conditions were miserable. According to my friend, the argument between the heroin addicts that I had overheard was not atypical behavior. This camp was completely unorganized, merely a small band of acquaintances scrabbling for the best situation they could find.

A few months later the camp was bulldozed. I often wondered what happened to the inhabitants; my friend was already gone from the place, and he wasn't a particular friend of anyone there. I couldn't forget them, not out of a particular fondness for them, but because of what they represented to me – the human faces behind all of the impersonal, anonymous numbers that I and so many others pored over when analyzing data and doing research on homelessness. I couldn't help but wonder if the people with the power to change those numbers, if the political and community leaders who, somehow, believed that these people deserved their fate, could see those faces as I did – if they lived among the homeless as I did, even briefly, there might finally be hope for them.

## Friends



by Paula Anderson  
Vendor #157

*In memory of Shawn Story.*

When friends pass away, there are days we cry, because some don't get a chance to say goodbye. All you have are the memories you have of them, and knowing that they are angels and are watching over us. That someday we will meet again, and that they would want us to live our life to the fullest and not be sad. Some of them have been in pain, some of them just did not know when to quit doing bad habits that made them lose their life.

All you need to do now is keep their memories in your heart.

## MISSION President “Jimmy” Hill

by MISSION members Sheri Wander and Greg Pratt

Our hearts ache with the loss of our dear friend, James Eric Hill. RIP, Jimmy. What is remembered, lives. And oh, you will be remembered! You took the suffering and challenges in your life and used them to help others; a role model and father figure to so many, and a friend and confidante to so many more. Your constant support of and solidarity with the most vulnerable and marginalized members of our society is an inspiration.

Jimmy passed on June 25, 2015, at age 48 after a 6-month battle with cancer. He was the loving father of Christopher Hill, Zachary Hill, Tyler Hill and Mary Kate Hill; beloved son of Anita and

Jimmy Hankins; dear brother of Jimmy Dean Hankins and Robert Hankins; dearest grandfather of Annabelle Rose Hill and one on the way. Jimmy also leaves behind a legacy of doing what you can with what you have. Many of us have been on the receiving end of Jimmy's gracious generosity and good-natured spirit! So it goes...

Thank you, Jimmy, for your friendship and your support. More than a friend, you were family. Our lives are better for having known you. May the ancestors greet you with open arms, and may those who mourn your passing in this realm find some comfort in knowing with certainty that the world is a better place for your time in it. James Eric Hill: *Presente!*

## More than selling papers

**continued from page 3**

speaker. Kevin thinks that too many people think they're not good enough. He believes that if people were more confident in their abilities, they would make better decisions and succeed more often. He lives by "kaizen," a Japanese word that means constant and never-ending improvement. Kevin is planning to enroll in Washtenaw Community College, and hopes to study psychology at the University of Michigan.

gan in order to help people change themselves for the better.

Behind the paper you now hold in your hands is a whole community of individuals with fascinating life stories, and hearts full of desires and dreams. Next time you purchase an issue of Groundcover, consider aspiring to learn something new about your vendor. The encounter surely will enrich both your lives.

## Meet Greg S., Vendor #311

by Maria Hagen

Greg S. likes to drive fast. His dream growing up was to own a Corvette. Greg grew up around cars in Detroit, often driving south with his grandfather, speeding along stretches of freeway. "I drove south two times a week," he said. "I used to be the lookout for police."

His grandfather owned old-time cars, including a 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air. These trips south to Alabama were the only times that Greg saw his sister, Karen, who is four years older.

As a child, Greg dreamed of racing cars or motorcycles, or playing football professionally. He wanted to become rich so he could take care of his mother and his grandmother who helped raise him – and to be able to afford a Corvette.

"My granny worked for U of M for 38 years," Greg said. "I wanted to take care of her." His mother, aunt, and grandmother all spoiled him growing up. "They gave me whatever I wanted," Greg added with a smile over his plate of food. We were having dinner with his girlfriend at the First Baptist Church of Ann Arbor.

"I used to lay my head in my granny's lap and she would pick the lint out of my hair," Greg said. "I used to run all

over the house finding lint to put in my hair and she would always pick it out. But at some point, there was no more lint and I stopped doing it."

The dream of playing football seems farfetched for some, but not for Greg, whose Uncle Otis played and coached for the Oakland Raiders. Greg began playing football early on, taking the position of running back where the fact that he was short didn't matter.

"I played with the older guys, 'cause I was so fast," Greg said. "They'd tell me to just take off, we'll throw you the ball." In high school Greg played on the same team as Dan Williams, who became a defensive end for the Denver Broncos and the Kansas City Chiefs.

For fun, Greg and his friends would go to downtown Detroit, especially for events like the Heritage Festival. "We went to get girls," he said, laughing. "You had to look sharp then. This was before cell phones, we had beepers then. When you got beeped, you had to go to a pay phone or a house phone."

In order to drive more cars, Greg learned to drive a manual transmission.



**Greg is good with equipment and cars and hopes to soon have a job where he can put those skills to use.**

"I learned from a buddy," Greg said. "We were driving on the freeway and he pulls over. We switched seats and he says 'Go.' It was stop and go for a while, with his buddy explaining the way the clutch worked and how to coordinate the pedals amid the speeding traffic.

"I can go anywhere on a freeway," Greg said proudly. "You put me anywhere on a freeway and I'll find my way."

Greg worked as a trucker for a while, getting to know every area of the United States. Besides that, Greg took jobs as a machine operator, working in construction and landscaping. "I'm good with heavy machinery," he added, grinning.

Instead of the big house he had envisioned for himself, Greg lives in a hotel, sharing a room with his girlfriend who introduced him to Groundcover News. She was new in Ann Arbor and had stumbled across the vendors in town.

"She got frustrated selling the papers," Greg told me. By now we had finished the meatloaf entrée and were on to the ice cream dessert. "So I decided to give it a try after work. I was good at it, too." When Greg lost his job, he became a vendor himself.

Greg and his girlfriend pool their resources, trying to find a cheaper, more permanent place to live. The first difficulty they encounter is that landlords don't want to rent a room to a couple. Then there is the problem that they don't have the money for a deposit, nor have the landlords accepted their proof of income letters from Groundcover News. Greg is hoping to land a factory job as machine operator which should help resolve the housing situation and start his life back on the right track.

## The first Groundcover vendor

by Elizabeth "Lit" Kurtz  
Groundcover Vendor #159

As we celebrated 2016 International Street Paper Vendor Week (February 1-7), we joined in with thousands of street paper vendors around the world. Some 25 years after the first modern street paper began, a young man in Ann Arbor was the first to answer the call of publisher Susan Beckett to become a Groundcover vendor.

Though the third man in his family with the same name – Louis – he is by Groundcover lineage the *first* to step up and begin the growing circulation of a local street paper.

The years have taken their toll on Louis. He struggles to chew a healthy snack of trail mix as we speak about his life. He reveals an alcohol addiction that began during his sophomore year in high school and has plagued him most of his life – through marriages, jobs, and spells of homelessness. He feels alcohol also contributed to the four years he spent prison.

Having a parent who was also an alcoholic didn't help. He recalls that his mother drank liquor while he was still at home and he would accompany her,

drinking a large 40-ounce beer of his own.

He has tried treatment and has had periods of being sober. He is struggling to overcome the addiction, and for the sake of his four-year-old daughter, is convinced that he can.

The son of a retired Ann Arbor principal, Louis is at a loss as to how his life could have gone so wrong, even with his alcoholism. He went through the Ann Arbor school system attending Bach Elementary, Slauson Middle School, and Pioneer High.

He says he was treated unfairly and had privileges revoked at the local shelter, the Delonis Center, so he is unable to get some of the services that might help him get back on his feet. However, Louis remains positive. He has a plan this year to get back into a treatment program that he feels can benefit him more now than in the past, when his youthful attitude prevented him from taking advantage of what it had to offer. With experience, he now knows that he had opportunities that he should have taken.

Before entering that program, he hopes to participate in the next International

Street Paper Vendor Week. Louis remembers the unique challenges of being among Groundcover's first vendors. Graffiti Alley was one of his first spots. Many people were not yet aware of the fledgling street paper and were puzzled about the concept. He recalls that many of the college students were not as receptive as they are now.

As the street paper model has taught us, no matter how far one has gotten

off track, you can always start again to work your way back to stability. Louis endeavors to do just that. So with any luck you will be able to meet and buy a paper from him. Between selling papers, he may have time to chat with customers about the early days of Groundcover. If I have my way, he'll be the only vendor wearing a crown.

Good luck, Louis!

## Vendor Week recap

by Elizabeth "Lit" Kurtz  
Groundcover Vendor #157

The first week of February 2016 – International Street Paper Vendor Week – was one of the best for Groundcover News. From Ann Arbor Mayor Christopher Taylor's proclamation of support for Groundcover to participation in D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything and Read), we had a ball. Even on short notice, the Small Church Community (SCC) from St. Mary's Student Parish participated in a group reading of Groundcover News. They also placed a special ad in the paper.

Local businesses also placed ads specifically to congratulate vendors. Some vendors received monetary gifts or gift cards from their customers. One customer gave any vendor with a balloon a 10-dollar bill!

International Street Paper Vendor Week happens every year during the first week of February. It is designed to not only bring awareness of the paper to the general public, but also as an opportunity for vendors to feel appreciated for the work we do. It renews our spirits and gives us the added momentum we need to continue. While this year's Vendor Week was great, we're hoping next year will be even more spectacular.

## Article to my mother

by La Shawn Courtwright  
Vendor #56

I'm so grateful for my mother. She taught me how to read, write, work, cook, clean and a lot of valuable lessons about life. I didn't always take heed of all of the things that she would tell me and I've had my share of regrets. I treasure having a mother that I can call and talk to. I can't and don't want to think of not having my mom here. We've had some ups and downs and it wasn't easy for me to get along with my mom for a number of years. I had to forgive her and myself for us to get back to where we are. There were times that didn't feel loved and was very rebellious to my mom. If she said "go right," I'd head left. I realized that I thought I was only hurting myself. It didn't dawn on me that when I was hurting myself, I was hurting her too. I appreciate and have a newfound respect for my mother more than I did earlier in my life's journeys.

I want my mom to know that I wouldn't change a thing because that's what made me who I am today. I will honor my mother by being the very best I can be.

So, thank you, Mom, for all of the blood, sweat and tears it took to help me be a better me today. Most of all, thank for not giving up on me. I love you always, Mom.

A mother's love  
Is a many treasured thing  
And on to her love  
I cling  
To hear her voice  
And see her face  
Bring much joy to  
My heart  
I never want to  
From her heart be apart  
She loved me before I knew  
How to love myself  
I place her love first  
Cause it's like nothing else  
A mother's love  
Is unique in kind  
When I'm goin' through somethin'  
My dear mother's teachins come to mind  
That's why a mother's love  
Is unique  
Like nothing to it  
Can compare  
I love my mom  
And for her  
I'll always be there  
Thank you Mom  
For your loving  
Caring WAY  
To you, for that,  
I wish you a  
Happy Mother's DAY!

## Costumes

by Joe Woods  
Groundcover Vendor #103

It's funny how people just look at a person's costumes  
Prejudging before getting to know a person

Costumes

Categorizing just because of a person's garment

He's a nerd because he wears High Waters, he's a thug because he wears baggy jeans

Costumes

It's weird how a person's costume can determine how a person may act towards you

If you're in a shirt and tie and speak to somebody they will speak

If you're wearing holey, bummy clothes and speak to somebody they ignore you

Costumes

As a Groundcover vendor, I wore many costumes and got many different reactions from people

Let's take time to open our minds and get to know people and not just look at their costumes

## One Thousand Hopes

by Tyrece Davis, aka Paradox

One thousand tears fall upon the face of the forsaken,

a blood soaked battlefield calls out with the cries of innocent lives.

For what purpose do I stand?

Five thousand weary soldiers stare across the horizon that

separates them from home. Ten thousand angels stand

ready as the legions of darkness surge forth.

Though rage has consumed all things, though the sanctity of life is all but forgotten,

one thousand petals still fall off

the candle of hope that eternally burns.

## No matter where you been

by Michael Ray Brown  
Vendor #306

There is no special time during the morning or a certain time during the evening that

Our heavenly Father proclaims we should kneel to worship Him in prayer.

He is the spiritual soul and heart of every human being and He hears the prayers we say

Whether we are in a church, in a field or on a vacation,  
Rest or play.

Our Heavenly Father does not demand that we kneel down to say a simple prayer

While working at our place of toil, or sitting in a chair.

He only asks us to worship him in our way of choices,

No matter where, no matter when, and no matter what time of night or day.

Because we can count on Him to hear the prayers we say,

Therefore our spirit should rejoice in His mercy.

And, let us not be ashamed to give him praise for the Blessings we may receive on this here day.

## Positive Affirmations

by Richard Lackley  
Groundcover Contributor

I am Somebody	I am all Sexes,
I was made from Love	Which describes me as Universal
I was created from the	I am the Universe
Master above	I have Pride and Dignity
Sometimes I don't know	I walk Proud and Pretty
Where I'm Going	Like I own the World
I ask God to direct me	I am Somebody Because
In the Right Direction	I smile I have a happy smile
I accept me, I accept who I am	I smile because I'm Happy
I have feelings, I have a Right	I smile because I'm Free
To be here	I am somebody today,
I am all Colors, I am all Races,	Tomorrow, and Forever

## Ode to a Music Teacher: Estar Cohen



Estar Cohen coaches vendor Eddy Powell in voice at Oz's.

by Eddy Powell  
Groundcover Vendor #32  
Arranged by Maria Hagen, Groundcover Intern

Estar is doing a great job,  
I'm not saying I wasn't always good  
I could always sing but she fueled my potential,  
She's a great person,  
She helped me clear up the places where I needed help,  
You know what I'm saying.

She's helped me interact better with people on the street,  
Seen my fees go up a lot, \$75 to \$175 in a week,  
I've got to widen, open up more,  
You know what I'm saying.

I'm learning "Only One" by Sam Smith  
Because it's really, really pretty.  
I spent two hours on YouTube just learning the chords,  
You know what I'm saying.  
YouTube is good with instructions too,  
I have to pause and go back  
It gives me experience to knock out everything else,  
You know what I'm saying.

She plays piano too,  
I've really got to give her credit.

She's very warm and patient, gentle, understanding and loving,  
Because of that I've grown enormously,  
She's such a quality person you can't put a stamp on it  
I'm not saying I wasn't always good  
But I'm so much better now.

# IN MEMORIAM

## Tributes to Shawn from friends

Compared to the larger population, the deaths of homeless individuals seem enormous. The sorrow we feel at the loss of one of our own is enormous, too. Such is the case with my Groundcover colleague, Shawn Story. I will miss him greatly.

- Lit Kurtz

Shawn was such a delight, and I hope his family knows how much this whole community loves him... There was just no way to not be happy when you were around Shawn. He was amazing to have around the house... He was always happy; I never knew how that worked.

In the morning, I'd come down wondering *where is my coffee*, and out of the bathroom popped Shawn with shaving cream on his head and coffee in his hand saying, "Peggy, how are you this morning?" You just couldn't be grumpy. He was also an excellent cook... it was such a blessing for St. Mary's when he started coming. He made the world a better place. - Peggy Lynch

Friday, just before he passed, I was in the library and smelled that barbecue sauce. I peeked around the corner and asked, "Is that you, Shawn, eating your barbecue?" "It sure is," he said. - Dori

Shawn served as an example that, when someone really wants to make a change in their life, they can do so. - Greg Hoffman

He was always smiling and dancing. I'm going to miss him, but I'll always remember that dance... He was a good dude. Thank God for the memories and his writing – he will always be alive.

- Joe

I had to learn to walk again. When Shawn saw me in my wheelchair, he said, "Girl, what happened?!" Every day, I would look forward to walking downtown where Shawn would say, "Ooh, you're walking better today!" and he would make a big joke out of it – he really encouraged me. And we had talks about God and his life, and I just didn't know he was that cool until we talked. I'm glad I took the time to get to know him. - Diahann Chatman

He gave of himself. He always gave. - a friend



Shawn Story had come so far and his passing was mourned by many.

I am a friend of Shawn's from St. Mary's, and what we shared was that we liked to shout joy. From half a block away, he'd be shouting, "Hey Rainey," and I'd be shouting, "Hey Shawn!" There aren't that many people in the world who shout with joy, and we will miss him. - Rainey

Shawn showed what a helping hand and perseverance can accomplish in someone's life... He had a smile on his face, no matter what. He always had a smile on his face – that infectious, joyous energy... he kept on smiling, he kept on going, he kept on trying. He slipped a few times, but he always got right back up. - Keagan Irrer

You all know him as Shawn, but I know him as "Ace." From 10 years old, when I first met him, through high school and my college years working at Fairlane Ford, teaching him how to drive, at basketball games, helping with my rental houses... He's one of my closest friends... I love you, Shawn! - Aaron

Shawn was like my welcome wagon at Groundcover. I almost quit writing... his infectious joy healed me in that moment. - Alice Newell

Shawn always seemed content. He found contentment in everything he does. The last conversation I had with him, I was trying to do this matched savings program I had just finished. He was adamant that he had everything he needed. He made more than he spent, and he was content. - Hailu

When I think of Shawn, I think of the term gentleman... he was a very gentle man. - Kathy Brindle

## William Crandell

Born June 15, 1968 and raised in St. Joseph, Michigan, William Crandell came to Washtenaw County earlier this year to try to piece his life back together. He was a special education educator, a writer, and recently, a Groundcover News vendor and contributor. Sadly, he encountered one more disappointment than he could bear and took his life on June 11, 2016. He is survived by his ex-wife Janine Crandell, his step children Cassidy and Jacob Brown of Baroda, brother David Crandell of Boca Raton, Florida, sister Joelle Crandell of New Castle and numerous aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces.



Photo by Benjamin Weatherston

## More than backsliders

by Susan Beckett  
Groundcover Publisher

The cover story run by *The Ann* in June 2016 left at least one reader wondering if she should continue to support all Groundcover vendors. The article was autobiographical and written by the late William Crandell, who also wrote for and sold Groundcover. He was candid about how his life fell apart and his subsequent drug and alcohol abuse, and that he sometimes used the money he earned selling Groundcover to buy alcohol.

I wish I could tell you that such a thing never happened or is extremely rare. It was one of my greatest concerns when starting Groundcover. I asked advice from John Loring, a former addict himself and then the director of PORT (an outreach division of Community Support and Treatment Services). He told me that an addict on a bender would not be organized enough to come to the office sober and with money to buy papers to resell. He said that someone determined to get high would find a way to do it, with or without Groundcover. He also said that the chances for recovery were much better if the individual had a structured activity and a community to return to.

With that in mind, we insist that vendors be sober when they buy and sell Groundcover News. We encourage treatment for those struggling with addiction. We strive to be a supportive community where vendors can find solace and companionship in a sober environment. We try to replace judgment with compassion. It's not easy.

It helps me to remember the words of Ingrid Munro, who ran Jamii Bora, a microcredit institution in Kenya: "One cannot lift a person out of poverty. What we can offer ... is a ladder that they can climb up to take themselves out of poverty. But the climbing they must do themselves."

She went on to say that some of Jamii Bora's borrowers are fast climbers and some of them are slow climbers – but they are all climbing.

That is how I look at Groundcover vendors. And when a person climbs, backsliding is not uncommon. Some take those first 10 free papers and parlay them into a viable income or a bridge to another job opportunity. Some, like Kevin Spangler (see article in Section 1, pg. 2), are at a place in their lives where they are ready to leave addiction behind and soar – going on to create businesses of their own or reclaim their place in the professional world.

Others sputter until they hit their stride. Then they often have long periods of stability until a calamity strikes and they lose their balance. Old traumas resurface. Dulling the pain leads back to old habits. And that first purchase might be financed by Groundcover sales. It could just as easily come from redeeming cans, panhandling or doing odd jobs.

But selling Groundcover has also become a habit and for many there is a pull to return that helps them recommit to sobriety. They miss their customers most of all. The conversation and support you provide makes them want to do better.